AS STRONG AS ROCK, 4 | SECRETS & SURPRISES, 14 | HEALTH & WELLNESS, 25

west hartford LIFE

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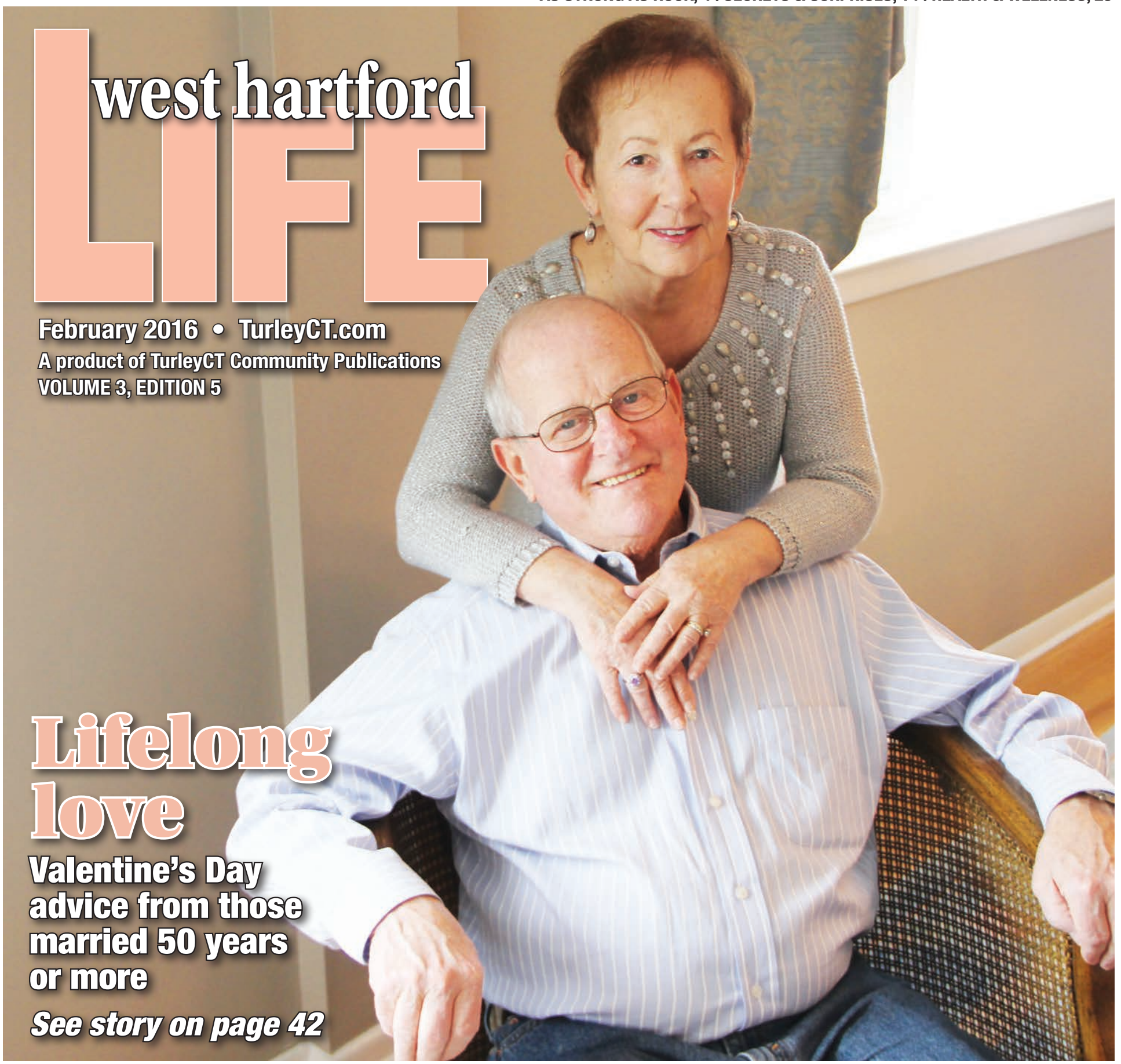
VOLUME 3, EDITION 5



Lifelong love

Valentine's Day advice from those married 50 years or more

See story on page 42

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CORRECTION:
The individual playing the organ at Beth El Temple pictured on page 22 of our January edition was misidentified; he is Floyd Higgins.

QUOTE OF NOTE:

"People tell me, 'You, don't get over it, you get through it,' and I think that's true. I think of Paul every single day."
- *Judi Duquette*

See story on page 4

ON THE COVER

Angelo and Tani Faenza share their secrets for a long, happy marriage in the story appearing on page 42.

Photo by Abigail Albair

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UCONN HEALTH

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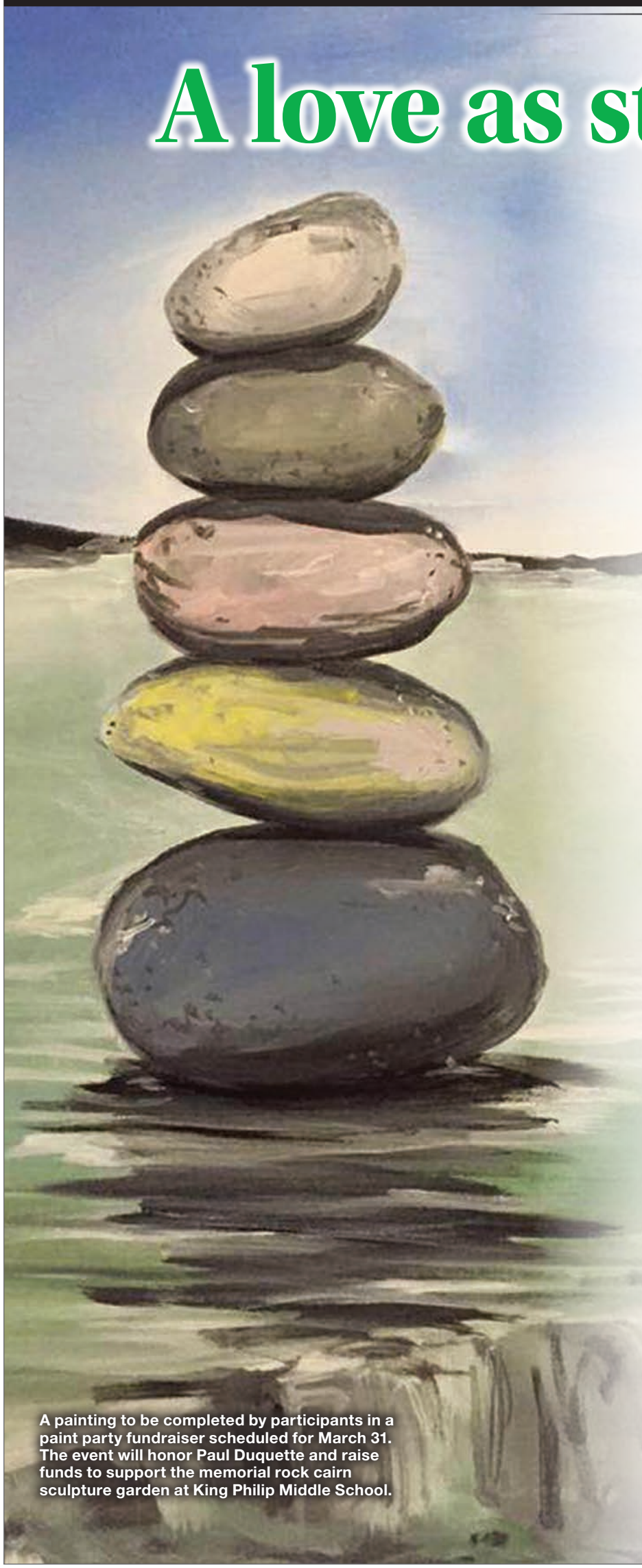
A love as strong as rock

School community seeks to memorialize beloved teacher with cairn sculpture garden

by Abigail Albair
Executive Editor



A painting to be completed by participants in a paint party fundraiser scheduled for March 31. The event will honor Paul Duquette and raise funds to support the memorial rock cairn sculpture garden at King Philip Middle School.

Paul Duquette loved many things, including rocks and the formations that can be created with them.

The King Philip Middle School teacher passed away suddenly last June, and in a search for a way to express their grief and to memorialize a dear friend, members of the school faculty formulated the idea of constructing a rock cairn sculpture garden.

"Rocks were his thing," King Philip art teacher Stacey Grindle explained, adding that she and Duquette were friendly as colleagues and once connected over their love of geology.

"When he passed away, I thought of this idea, that it would be a nice tribute to him to create this cairn memorial – the cairn being rocks that stack up on one another," she said. "It would be a connection to him and a way that all of us here at the school could remember him."

Duquette lived in West Hartford for nearly his entire life. He was a graduate of Hall High School and had taught social studies at King Philip for more than 20 years at the time of his passing.

He had a passion for music and sports, and previously coached lacrosse and basketball at Hall.

His close friend, Pete Gustafson, has taught physical education at King Philip for more than 10 years.

They played basketball together in a pickup league, attended concerts together and often talked for long periods of time, just musing on different aspects of life.

The loss of his friend hit Gustafson hard, as it did the entire school community.

"He was here on the last day of school and went home not feeling well. He went to the hospital and passed away the next day," Gustafson recalled of Duquette, who died of pneumonia.

When the idea of memorializing the beloved teacher was raised, the cairn seemed like a perfect fit, he said.

"He spent a lot of time in Newport and he'd always come home with rocks. He had a big rock garden out in his backyard. He'd spend a lot of time out there with his grandson, Cam."

Cairns are often constructed as monuments of remembrance, so Gustafson said having one in Duquette's honor felt natural.

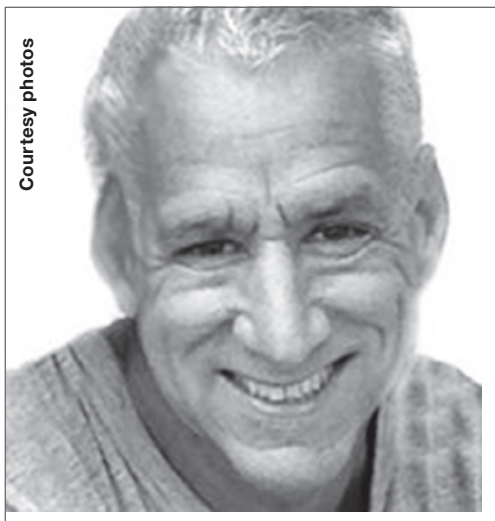
"It just felt right to do that, so it's something we've been working on since August," he said. "Then came the overwhelming task of: 'What is this going to take?' and we're realizing it's going to take a lot of work and money to get it done, but there are so many people that are on board with it we feel like we can make it happen."

A group of roughly a dozen teachers came together to formulate plans for honoring their colleague. They meet a few times a month to brainstorm ideas for fundraising to build the cairn. Sporting events have been held, dress down days on Fridays contribute some dollars and the group is selling T-shirts as well to support the memorial garden effort.

Grindle is also planning a cairn-inspired paint night at the American Legion for March 31 to help the cause. Doors open at 6 p.m. Participants will complete a painting of a rock cairn and a raffle will also be part of the evening. Art supplies were donated by Blick Art Supplies in Plainville to help defray the cost of the event. Anyone interested in participating can send a check for $40 to Grindle at King Philip Middle School before March 28.

With so much fundraising underway, the struggle, Grindle said, has been finding a landscape designer to work with them at a

Courtesy photos



Paul Duquette, a treasured social studies teacher at King Philip for more than 20 years, passed away suddenly last June.

reasonable price.

"Our vision is pretty specific," she said.

The first quote the group received for $16,000 was much more than they had expected, so the idea has been scaled back to eliminate a large set of pavers that would have circled the garden and created pathways.

EA Quinn out of Glastonbury recently visited the site and seemed optimistic about the job, Grindle said.

"He really cared and the kids knew he cared. He had this wonderful connection with the students and he created an unbelievable learning environment for them."

–Pete Gustafson

"We know that we could probably raise $5,000 and we're hoping that this company will give us a quote like that," she said. "A large cairn will be about five feet tall. We want it to be pretty impressive. It would be surrounded in a larger 20-foot circumference pool of pea-stone with a cobblestone border so it looks like a pond made of rocks with the cairn in the middle representing Paul."

The memorial rock garden will be located next to the commons on the King Philip property.

The Technology and Engineering Department is going to create a bench for the space, completing it as a quiet area of reflection.

The teachers have created a GoFundMe page and are continuing to entertain fundraising ideas.

The hope is to have the garden installed by late spring.

If all goes well, the teachers also plan to begin an award in Duquette's name bearing a motto of his, "It Matters," which was a phrase he took from a student writing assignment that Grindle said deeply resonated with him.

Duquette was treasured by his students, Gustafson said.

"He really cared and the kids knew he cared," he said. "He had this wonderful connection with the students and he created an unbelievable learning environment for them."

Duquette made it a point to know every student's name and their interests, be it sports, music, a love of their pets or any other hobby.

"Whatever it was that interested them, that's what he wanted to talk to them about," Gustafson said.

Minor emergency?

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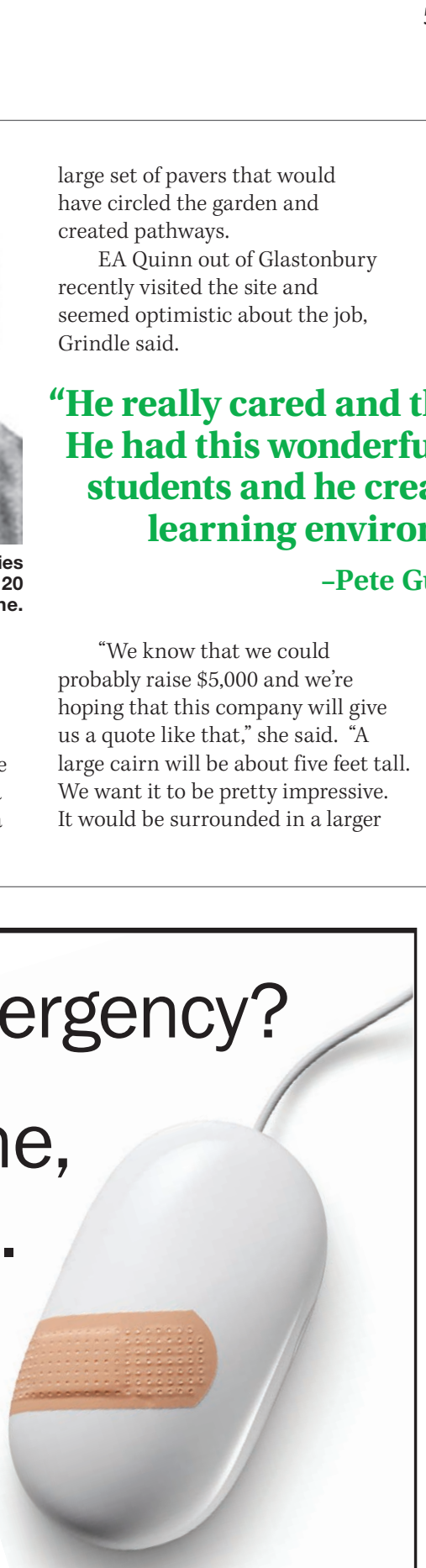

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"And he remembered. He wouldn't just say 'Get your homework out,' at the start of class, he'd go to each kid and say, 'How did the game this weekend go?'"

Gustafson has remained close with Duquette's wife, Judi, since her husband's passing, and said she has showed him some of the poetry and drawings that Duquette shared only with her.

"Paul was a poet. He did some beautiful, beautiful poetry and, in some instances, he would write me poems and put them into drawings," Judi Duquette said. "He had a lot of sides but they were all wonderful. He was the epitome of goodness."

She said she is touched by the efforts of Duquette's colleagues to honor him, and that she has appreciated, in particular, Gustafson's support.

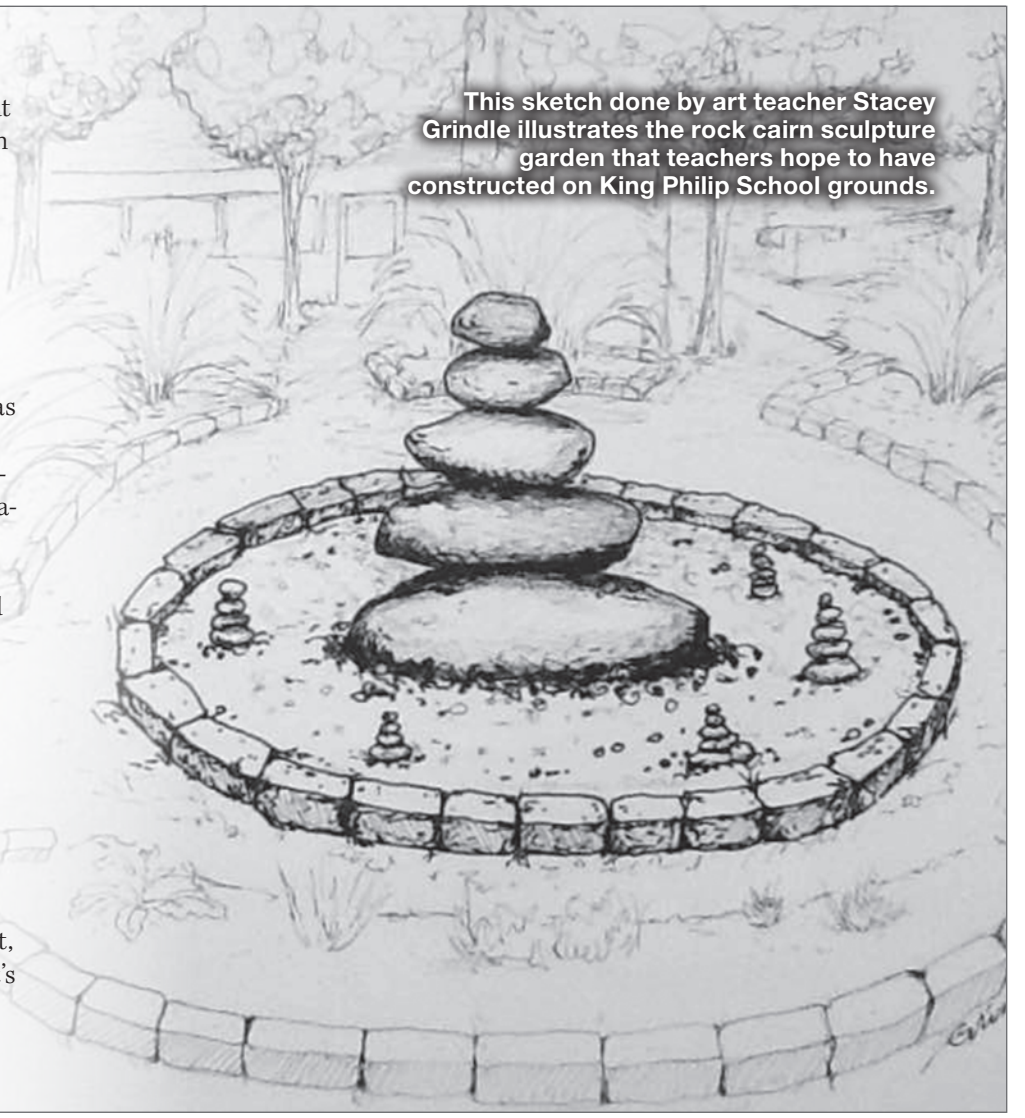
"Pete has been a rock for me, pardon the pun," she said. "I know with Pete being involved it's going to be the perfect way to honor Paul."

She said the teachers asked her for suggestions for the garden, but she wants the creation to be one of their doing.

"I want it to be theirs," she said. "I want to enjoy it and share in it, but I want it to be their vision more than mine. … This is so Paul. He had this love of nature, especially rocks, though I know it sounds silly. He loved rock formations and being at the beach. This is perfect for him."

Duquette's parents still live in West Hartford. He is also survived by three brothers and a sister. He was "very proud" of his son from a previous marriage, and was a loving stepfather to Judi's daughter and grandfather to her daughter's son, Judi said.

"Paul was an amazing person. He was so kind and so generous and I'm so glad [the school] is doing something to memorialize him in this way," she said. "His students always came first and I think that this is a beautiful way to show that. … We had just celebrated our 20th anniversary. We were lucky to find each other. My heart is still broken and I'm sure will be for some time. People tell me, 'You, don't get over it, you get through it,' and I think that's true. I think of Paul every single day." **WHL**



This sketch done by art teacher Stacey Grindle illustrates the rock cairn sculpture garden that teachers hope to have constructed on King Philip School grounds.

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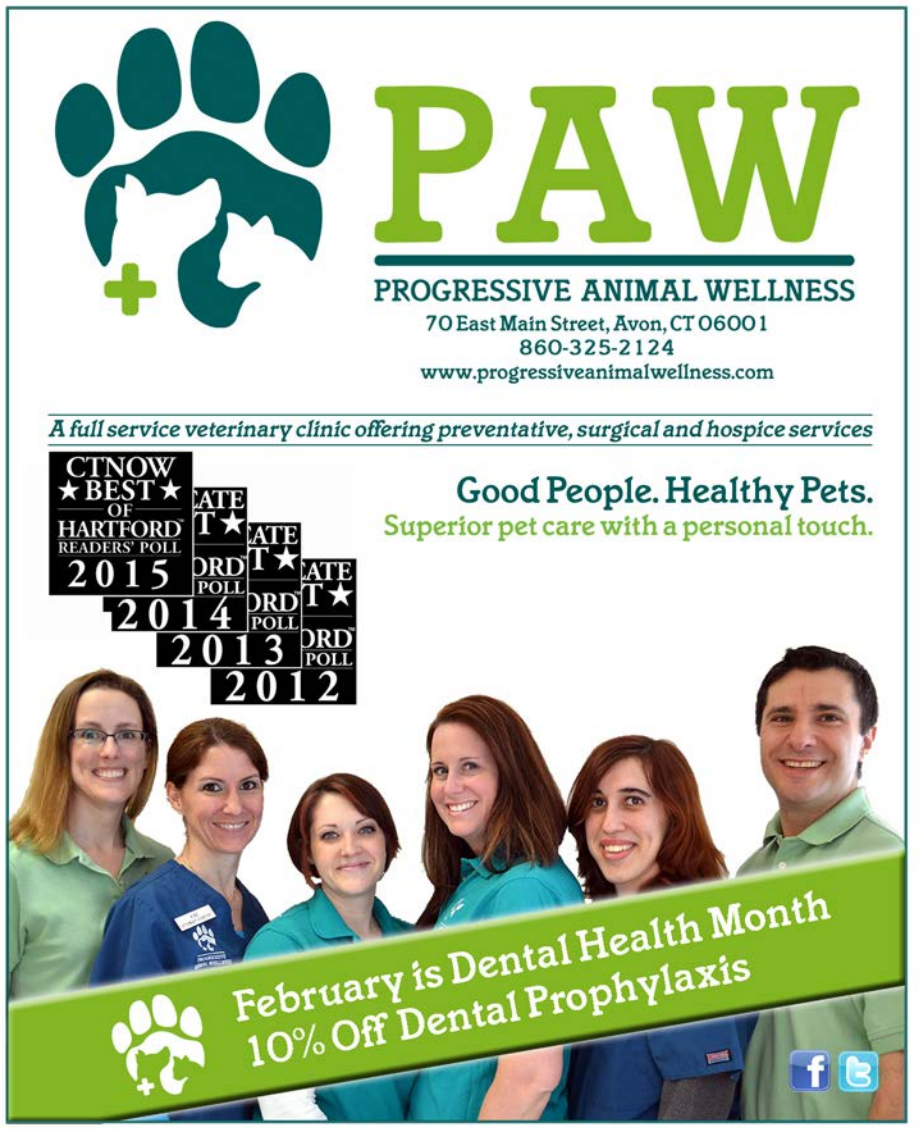

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A long tenure

Larry Shapiro retires after 35 years in the Legislative Commissioners' Office

by Alicia B. Smith
Staff Writer

Photo by Alicia B. Smith

Larry Shapiro thanks his family, friends and colleagues for their support.

Thirty-five years ago, when Larry Shapiro was an attorney in the Legislative Commissioners' Office, democracy in action consisted of folding several pages of proposed amendments to bills in thirds and dropping the bundle out the window of a Hartford Trinity Street office. A runner would pick up the bundle off the sidewalk and bring it to the nearby State Capitol where the General Assembly was actively working to get the bill passed.

These days, Shapiro said, changes to bills are sent via email. This is one of the many changes Shapiro has seen during his tenure at the LCO, where he served as director the last 10 years.

"Democracy can be a very messy process," he said, "flying" amendments not withstanding.

The LCO is one of three offices that provide professional services to members in the General Assembly. It works specifically with drafting bills, while the Legal Research Office conducts research on issues for the legislature and the Fiscal Office contends with budget issues.

The office dates back to 1892 when the Connecticut General Assembly enacted a bill that would allow the secretary of the senate and speaker of the house to appoint a "clerk of bills." The following year the duties were clarified and included instructions for the clerk to examine

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all proposed bills and prepare any amendments related to the bill.

In the late 1920s the clerk of bills became the Statute Revision Commissioner, later the Legislative Commissioner, the Legislative Commissioners and Legislative Research Department and, in 1965, the Legislative Commissioners' Office.

Shapiro came to Connecticut after being hired as one of the attorneys in the LCO.

He said he always had an interest in government policy. His experience with VISTA – Volunteers in Support of America, a pre-cursor to AmeriCorps – where he volunteered following graduate school, inspired his interest in law.

While at VISTA, Shapiro was working amongst Native Americans in North Dakota with an economic development corporation that also had a training center and social service programs. The center had a small legal department.

"I saw lawyers understood how things worked and could make changes," Shapiro said. "If I wanted to work in law it would be a great background. Lawyers know how things worked, what the laws were and they could be effective."

Following his stint with VISTA, Shapiro applied to law school. He had earned a degree in political science from Stanford and attended Boston College Law School earning his degree in 1980.

"The legislative branch is the closest to the people – this is where all the ideas from across the state come from. It's fascinating to be contributing at this level."
–Larry Shapiro

The Framingham, Massachusetts native later visited his sister, then a student at the University of Connecticut. During the visit he learned the LCO was hiring; he applied and moved to Connecticut when he took the job. He first lived in Hartford before moving to West Hartford in 1983.

Attorneys working for the LCO help legislative committees draft amendments to proposed bills in both the house and senate. It is the attorney's job to develop the language of the bill.

"We are nonpartisan," Shapiro said. "We work for both parties in the house and senate. It's an unusual position for a lawyer, here we are representing all sides at the same time."

Attorneys also review state agency regulations and assist in developing the appropriate language to ensure the regulation is stated clearly.

When the General Assembly is in session, Shapiro said there are 20 attorneys and 14 support personnel that he oversees in his role as director.

When the General Assembly is not in session, the LCO works on its publishing unit, which compiles a book of all the laws that have passed during the year.

During his tenure at LCO, Shapiro staffed the energy committee for six years, which at the time worked to promote renewable energy and limit nuclear energy in the state as well as promote energy conservation. In the 1980s, Shaprio staffed the transportation committee and helped to draft legislation that removed tollbooths that once adorned the states highways and bridges.

He was also one of several attorneys to work on infrastructure bills following the Mianus River bridge collapse in 1983.

Shapiro was a member of the commerce committee, which creates a range of economic development programs, where he worked to create legislation to promote tourism in Connecticut.

Shapiro was also involved when the state was working to get the New England Patriots to move here from their longtime home in Foxboro, Massachusetts. For 19 years he oversaw the government and

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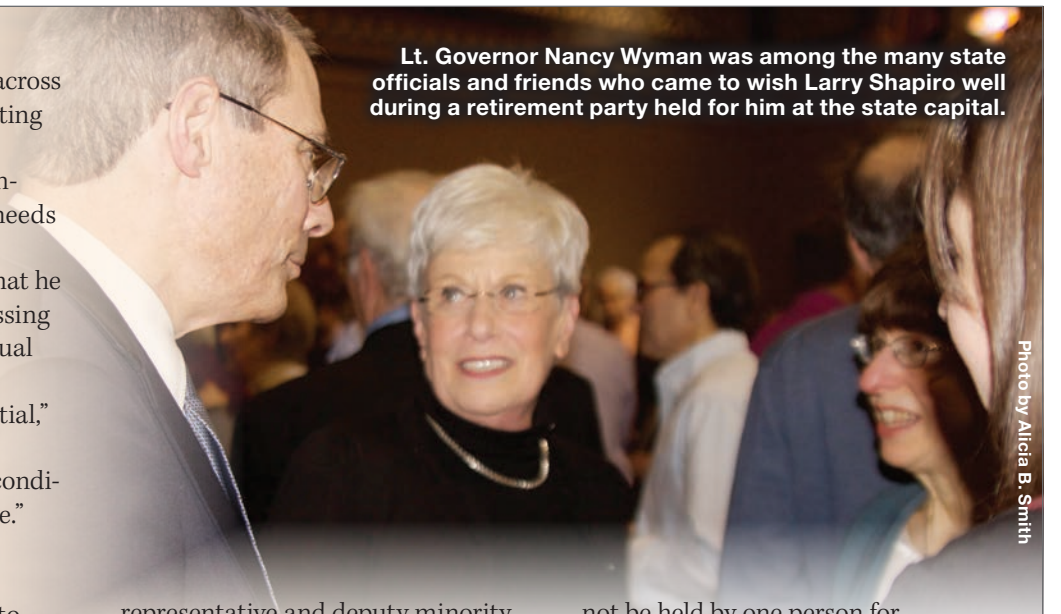
Lt. Governor Nancy Wyman was among the many state officials and friends who came to wish Larry Shapiro well during a retirement party held for him at the state capital.

Photo by Alicia B. Smith

administration of elections committee.

"It was a lot of election reform," he said, adding that through the years it involved a direct primary bill, which enabled candidates to qualify for a primary, opening up the nominating process as well as allowing voter registration on the day of an election.

"The biggest bill I did I wrote a public financing of election bill," he said, adding that the bill would provide state grants to candidates who qualified.

In 2005 Shapiro became the director of the LCO.

"I was always interested in leadership and management," he said. "I was now responsible for the entire office. I had never been a supervisor before. I had a lot of ideas on management but also had a lot to learn as well, especially in personnel management."

As director, Shapiro was less involved in drafting bills but rather had a role in reviewing them. He explained that this was more of a legal advisory position.

"The opportunity to be creative, experiment, that has been very exciting," Shapiro said. "I believe very highly in the legislative branch of government within the three branches of government," he said. "The legislative branch is the closest to the people – this is where all the ideas from across the state come from. It's fascinating to be contributing at this level."

Legislation, he said, is "constantly changing to meet the needs of our society."

As director, Shapiro said that he adopted the philosophy of stressing the importance of each individual and his or her contributions.

"There was so much potential," he said. "I just love seeing what everyone can do and creating conditions where everyone can thrive."

At his retirement party in December, Shapiro told those gathered that he was grateful to have become friends with so many of his colleagues.

"He's a policy wonk, a parliamentary procedure guy."

–Deputy Speaker Bob Godfrey

"I have learned so much and have been enriched by every person I have met," he said.

While the General Assembly was in session, late nights were not uncommon.

"He's a policy wonk, a parliamentary procedure guy, but most of all he has been a leader, a friend," Deputy Speaker Bob Godfrey said at the retirement party. "I will miss his experience in leading."

"The great thing about our office is we have several people who go above and beyond that make our job easier," said Bill Hamzy, former state representative and deputy minority leader. "It's going to be extremely difficult to replace Larry Shapiro."

Jim Tracy, executive director of the Office of Legislative Management, said that when Shapiro first took the role as director, the first thing he did was become a student.

"If I was in a position to grade you I would give you an A-plus," Tracy told him, explaining, "He had a vision 10 years ago. Through all of his accomplishments we are the beneficiaries."

Shapiro said he began to think about retiring a few years ago and found the idea to be "terrifying."

Since then he has warmed up to the concept in what he called "an evolution of thinking" since then.

"I love the job but it just became the right time," he said.

When he took the position of director, Shapiro thought he would stay for five to 10 years as he believed that the role should not be held by one person for much longer than that.

"It just felt so ready, the office is in great shape," he said.

Shapiro is married to Gail and they have two adult daughters, Julie and Michelle.

During his retirement party, he referred to his wife as his "best friend" and expressed his appreciation for her support and listening skills throughout his career.

His plan, once officially retired, which took place at the beginning of 2016, was to relax for a few months and spend time with friends and family.

He eventually sees himself working part time or on special projects and said he would be interested in doing some teaching at the post high school level.

"You don't think it's going to come but it does come," he said of the end of his career. "I'm very fortunate, I'm in good health and I've had a great career here." **WHL**

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Pamela Atwood, director of dementia services at Hebrew HealthCare, and Julia Pistell, co-founder of Hartford-based Sea Tea Improv have joined together to share their talents to benefit Alzheimer's and dementia patients.

Photo by Alicia B. Smith

Finding reality in the moment

Improv techniques offer assistance to caretakers of dementia patients

by Alicia B. Smith
Staff Writer

It is easy to roll your eyes, correct what you have just been told or argue facts. None of these, however, are very helpful and often lead to frustration for all involved.

When it comes to communicating with an individual suffering from Alzheimer's or another form of dementia, caregivers have discovered that the best way is to meet the individual where they are, literally.

"It's about joining them in their reality and redirecting them to something positive," said Pamela Atwood, the director of dementia services at Hebrew HealthCare.

What Atwood has suggested is beneficial and seems easy enough in principle, however, it can be challenging to put in to practice, but she was not to be deterred.

Atwood has been a fan of performer Karen Stobbe, who developed a six-week training program called "In the Moment," in which she uses improv techniques developed from her own experience performing and contending with parents who have Alzheimer's disease. When an opportunity came up to invite a local improv group into her facility to train her staff, Atwood took it.

Members of Hartford's Sea Tea Improv visited last fall and the changes they helped introduce have been immense.

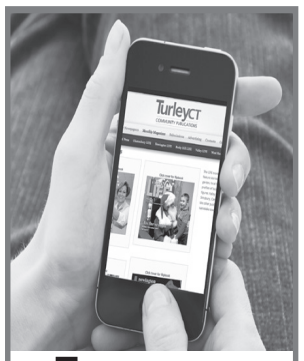
"The medical model is to keep people safe," Atwood said.

To complement that, the training staff received helped to improve communication with patients.

"That has been really transforming," she said.

Julia Pistell, a founding member of Sea Tea Improv, was among those in her group leading the training. She and her staff shared with caretakers a number of common improv techniques so that when they are caring for an Alzheimer's or dementia patient, everyone feels more comfortable.

"The most basic principal of



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improv is 'Yes, and ... ,'" Pistell said, adding that the "yes" component tells the patient that they were heard and then the conversation can be gently steered towards something more positive.

"It's listening and affirming, and then building on what has been presented," she said.

Pistell used this example of a patient saying, "It's such beautiful summer day, perfect for some ice cream," when in fact it is a winter day, with temperatures in the upper 20s so that ice cream might not be that appetizing. Rather than correct the patient by informing them it's not summertime and would not be a good time to enjoy some ice cream, a better response would be, "Yes, it is a beautiful day and I like ice cream, too."

This affirms they heard the patient, accepts the reality that in their mind it is summer and ends on a positive note.

Atwood explained that a common situation with patients who are now in a facility is they declare they want to go home – understandable as they are no longer in familiar surroundings and do not feel ill, so do not feel they need to be in a medical facility. The reality is they are unable to care for themselves at home.

Telling them, "No you can't go home, this is your home now," would be true, but could be crushing. A more constructive way to handle this conversation is to try something like, "Yes, home is a special place; let's go to dinner now." Such a statement is affirming and redirects the patient to another, less stressful, idea, she said.

"It's about joining them in their reality and redirecting them to something positive."
–Pamela Atwood

"It's a very strange marriage of two things, two entirely different disciplines have come together," Pistell said of improv and healthcare. "It seems obvious, but it isn't for so many people."

The mission, she said, is "getting people to relax and accept where they actually are rather then get frustrated."

Using these improv techniques can also keep the caregiver from falling into a common practice that often leads to feelings of frustration or being overwhelmed. A natural thing to do is an assessment by asking a series of common questions: how are you; what did you have for breakfast today; did you go to that activity. On the surface these are polite questions, but for an Alzheimer's patient, they can lead to confusion; they might not remember what they had for breakfast, they no longer know if they attended an activity earlier in the day.

"It's like a quiz," Atwood said of the loved one or caretaker asking these types of questions which often are done to assess if person's disease has improved.

"With each question, it's a little bit of heartbreak," Atwood said.

Pistell noted that one of the important rules of improv is to never ask any questions, which only puts the person they are working with on the spot.

"It's crazy if you are doing it to someone with a cognitive impairment," Atwood said.

Additionally, Pistell explained that another principle in improv is to always make your partner look good.

"Making your partner look good is about treating the other person with dignity," Pistell said, and that is the ultimate goal when working with dementia patients.

"You have to go with their motivation," Atwood said. "We talk a lot about focusing on feelings, not facts."

Atwood described Alzheimer's as a neurological disease that causes dementia. It can also cause a physical decline in the patient. Dementia, on the other hand, is affiliated with how a person thinks, or damage that causes the patient to have issues with memory. Other conditions,

including thyroid issues, can cause dementia. Some dementia can be treated with drugs.

"Alzheimer's is the most common cause of dementia," Atwood said.

A portion of Atwood's job consists of researching grants for training and other programs. When a donor was interested in making a contribution, Atwood invited her to come with her to see Sea Tea Improv perform at City Steam in Hartford.

"She loved it," Atwood said, adding that it means a lot when a donor can immediately see the benefits of how such a program would function. Atwood is in the process of bringing the improv training to her facility's partners in Newington, Southington and New Britain. She will also be a part of a train-the-trainer session at the upcoming Alzheimer's conference in the spring where she will be the one teaching attendees about the concept of improv.

Pistell said presenting improv techniques as a means of facilitating communication with caretakers and dementia patients was something her group had wanted to do for some time and was pleased they had an opportunity to do so.

"Pamela was great and open-minded about what people living with dementia and Alzheimer's need," Pistell said, adding that now the theory of care focuses on "joining the metaphor."

Pistell and her colleagues will begin the hour-long workshop with a sketch so those in the training session see what improv looks like. Then attendees are then encouraged to try it for themselves.

"It's a unique art; we have to explain it each time," Pistell said, defining it as "two or more people [who] create short theatrical scenes or plays off the tops of their heads, without a script."

Her group offers private workshops and corporate training. It also teaches in the Hartford Public Schools.

"Everything we do is customized," she said. "We are offering a training that is fun, positive and very proactive."

Atwood admitted that her colleagues who attended the training were skeptical when it came to staying for an hour-long program, but quickly warmed up to the idea.

"This has been something in which we don't have to teach people to control others," Atwood said.

Noting the impact the training has had on her staff and patients, she said, "I see a lot more laughter."

Staff is also sharing more information with her about patients and she has been very pleased with the results.

"It tells me there is an open-mindedness," she said.

Pistell and her group will be performing at the Alzheimer's Association statewide annual conference in April to demonstrate how improv can help. **WHL**

Courtesy Photo

Watching improv helps illustrate how it can be applied off stage.

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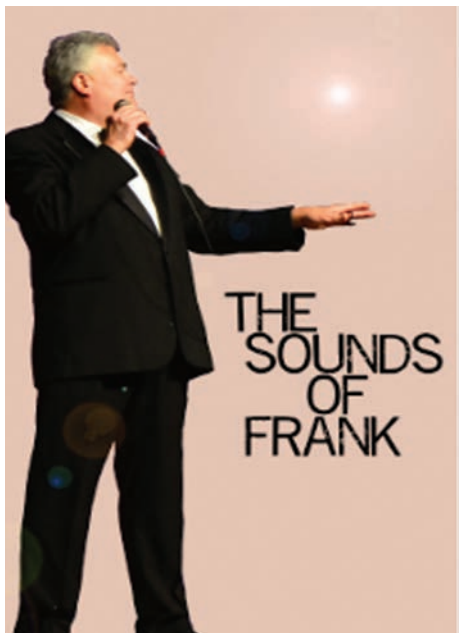

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Secrets and surprises

Historical society has gems in its collection no one gets to see

Story and photos by Lynn Woike
Editor

In addition to decorative arts, manuscripts, antique furniture and hundreds of other objects on display at the Noah Webster House in West Hartford are thousands of items not normally on view to the public.

Functioning not only as the Noah Webster House but also as the West Hartford Historical Society, the museum serves as a repository for West Hartford-related objects and ephemera. These are objects that don't make it into Noah Webster's birthplace for various reasons. Many are not appropriate for the historical periods represented in the house. Some are too fragile.

Built on South Main Street in approximately 1750, the building was the birthplace and childhood home of Noah Webster, the creator of the first American dictionary and the Blue-Backed Speller, a teacher, lawyer and early abolitionist. It was restored by the Noah Webster Foundation, a private 501(c)(3) organization, and opened to the public as a museum in the late 1960s. In the 1970s, the West Hartford Historical Society merged with the foundation.

The building includes the historic four-room house, an education center with the reproduction of a working hearth, exhibition galleries and a visitor center.

The museum and historical society opened its doors to West Hartford LIFE, presenting a selection of treasures that are rarely seen.

Executive Director Jennifer Matos said that donations to the collection are gladly accepted, providing they relate to Noah Webster or West Hartford.

"We're here to preserve local items and memories for the future," she said.

In that vein, the Noah Webster House and West Hartford Historical Society – with Direct Line Media – is inviting people to learn how to preserve their own family history. On February 6 from 1-3 p.m., people are invited to a Show and Tell, to share a treasured possession and family memories. Old photos, family mementos and local historic artifacts are just some of the objects brought to previous sessions. Personal historian David Chmielewski will host the event.

For more information about the museum, visit noahwebsterhouse.org or call 860-521-5362.

Carved peach pits

A few dozen carved peach pits were donated to the historical society in 1987. They are said to have been cut by Edgar Lutner, a faculty member at the American School for the Deaf. The carvings arrived carefully stored in six small tin tobacco boxes. The intricate carvings of the stone pits include furniture, household items, animals and letters.

Oil painting

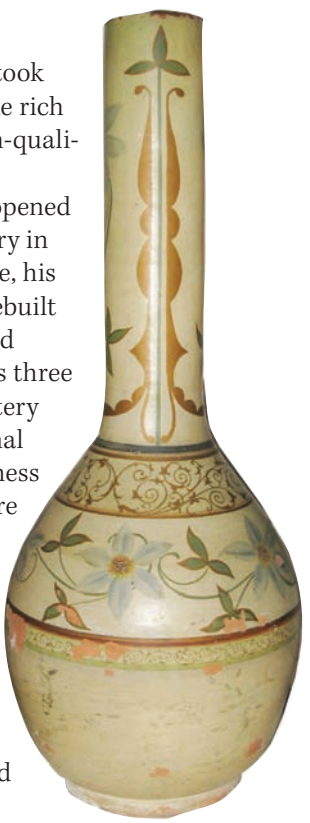
This oil painting demonstrates West Hartford's involvement in a national Temperance Movement in the early 19th century. Alcohol was blamed for many of society's problems, among them illnesses, unemployment, destitution and crime. Known collectively as the "Cold Water Army," temperance crusaders used every conceivable method to get youth to pledge total abstinence. Beginning in the 1830s, they used pamphlets, pictures and lectures to reform drinkers, and held rallies with songs and skits to attract converts. The painting shows a parade of young people carrying "No Alcohol" and "Cold Water Army" banners. The hyphen in West-Hartford refers to the West Division of Hartford. The painting was donated to the collection in 1976.

Saddle bags

These heavy brown leather saddlebags once belonged to Moses Goodman of the West Division. In 1777, when American soldiers at Valley Forge were struggling, Connecticut residents in the Hartford area raised $30,000 to be sent to the soldiers. Goodman volunteered to transport the money to Valley Forge, placing it in these saddlebags and travelling safely on horseback to deliver the money.

Pottery

Seth Goodwin took advantage of the rich deposits of high-quality clay found in Elmwood and opened Goodwin Pottery in 1798. After a fire, his son, Thomas, rebuilt the business and worked with his three sons. Their pottery achieved regional fame. The business had a second fire in 1867 and once again was rebuilt. They added more land south of New Britain Avenue and constructed



a larger building. Goodwin Pottery employed more than 75 people. In addition to the ordinary pieces, they added terra cotta designs and fine china. The Goodwin family maintained the business until it was destroyed by a third fire in 1908. This vase stands about 30 inches tall and would have been one of the larger pieces made.

Smelling salts

This small glass bottle labeled "Lavender Smelling Salts, Yardley, New York" is from the late 19th or early 20th century. During the Victorian age, smelling salts became a popular medical treatment. Police officers and emergency workers carried them as "lady revivers" – presumably because females fainted more often than men, generally due to wearing items of clothing that restricted breathing. The smelling salts were used to "excite the nostrils."

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Anniversary plate

This plate was released in 1954 to mark the town's 100th anniversary. Among the images it depicts are the Congregational Church, the first Town Hall, Noah Webster's house, Mill Pond, the library, the entrance to Charter Oak Park and Goodman Green.

Leather boots

These five-inch black leather boots with olive green uppers have laces and pointed toes. They were worn by Mabel Hawkins Craig in 1913. Ladies' boots from this era ranged in cost from $4 to $8.

Telephone

This telephone, donated by Roland Selden in 1990, had been mounted on the wall in the Selden family home prior to 1915. The phone is labeled "The Connect Telephone and Electric Company, Meriden, Conn." The family has resided in West Hartford since the 1770s.

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Wooden toy

This wooden toy horse and wagon was used as a promotional piece for Frank A. King, a dairyman in town. The wagon is painted with the business name, license number and products for sale. In addition to the wagon and horse, there is a miniature milk basket with six small milk bottles. King's farm was located at 749 Park Road (what is today Sedgwick Road), and spanned the area around Duffy School. In 1927, A.C. Petersen bought from King 21 cows, one bull, one milker outfit, a pair of horses, a collection of farm equipment, 60 tons of hay and five tons of oats.

Stereoscopic viewer

This stereoscopic viewer dates from the 1890s. With it are 50 double transparent slides of well-known sites. First patented by Sir Charles Wheatstone in 1838, stereoscopes were popularized by Oliver Wendell Holmes and becamse one of the most popular forms of entertainment in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Using the special viewer, two two-dimensional pictures appear merged together to create a single three-dimensional photograph. The Viewmaster is a descendant of the stereoscope.

Velvet hat

This deep red velvet hat with large plume dates from 1880. The museum has an excellent collection of vintage clothing, textiles, hats and shoes that span 300 years of the town's history. Most have been donated by past residents.

Military uniform

This navy blue wool military jacket has metal buttons, split tails and decorative trim of silver curls. There are red panels on the front, collar, cuffs and the trim on the tails. Although there is not much information about this specific jacket, a collector thought the buttons might be from a New York state militia unit from around 1798. The Militia Acts of 1792 provided for states to organize militias and provided for the president of the United States to take command of the militias in times of imminent invasion or insurrection. **WHL**

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To live, work and play

New investment group will help shape future of the Center

by Abigail Albair
Executive Editor

Photos by Abigail Albair

LaSalle Road Partners, LLC has purchased three buildings in West Hartford Center, including this one that houses Grant's and Cookshop Plus.

The new owners of three buildings encompassing 72,000 square feet in West Hartford Center have a three-phase approach to the future.

LaSalle Road Partners, LLC purchased 52-84 LaSalle Road, 977 Farmington Avenue and 989-991 Farmington Avenue in December from the Sinatro brothers, who owned the buildings for more than half a century and continue to maintain office space on LaSalle Road.

Current tenants in those buildings include Restaurant Bricco, BK&Co., Grants Restaurant and Bar, Music & Arts and the recently opened Cookshop Plus.

The new investment group is comprised of Corridor Ventures, Rockport Investments and Tecca Ventures.

It was announced January 21 that First Niagara would provide financing for the LaSalle Road Partners, LLC purchase and renovation of the three buildings.

"We were very excited about what LaSalle Road Partners was trying to accomplish with the development of these buildings and we are pleased to provide them with the financing that will assist with the growth and development of this popular neighborhood," Jeanneen Griffin, first vice president and senior relationship manager at First Niagara, said in a press release.

Four of the six partners in the endeavor recently sat down with West Hartford LIFE to discuss their plans going forward.

"Phase one is to focus on leasing the empty spaces and working with our existing tenants to enhance their businesses," Hagan Brown, a partner with Corridor Ventures, explained.

The second phase, which they expect to begin shortly, will entail making capital investments into the property façade to update the look both inside (office common areas) and out, and to brighten up the streetscape.

"There is a chance that you might see more façade investment

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The former Plimpton's space next to Music & Arts is one of the biggest retail spots currently vacant, and one of the first places the new owners will seek to fill.

before you see tenants coming in," Brown said.

The third phase will include potential redevelopment, not of the existing buildings, but in the parking areas behind the retail and office spaces.

"Rumors that we are going to knock down the buildings and redevelop them are inaccurate. We want to enhance the value that the Sinatros created," Brown said.

The focus at the moment, Brown said, is "to find the right mix of tenants for our vacant spaces and bring more traffic to the center."

Although the partners have heard some feedback that more restaurants aren't needed in the Center, Brown said existing restaurants are so popular that the right kind of establishment could be a success.

A regional player, for example a restaurant with an existing location in Fairfield County that has wanted to be in West Hartford, might be the right fit, Brown said, though options are currently wide open.

"We want to deliver something we believe will be of value to the community and its constituents," Brown said. "We're thinking about it strategically. Obviously we need to make sure we do a good job creating the tenancy that will serve both our tenants business plans and our own economic objectives."

The sale of the buildings grew out of a relationship one of the investment group partners developed over a long period of time with the Sinatros, Corridor Ventures President Dan Joseph said.

"The Sinatros care a lot about the property and care a lot about West Hartford Center," Brown said. "They created a great foundation and they looked at us being local – some of us having grown up here – to help keep what they started going."

"Our partnership group has all worked together before and everyone brings something to the table," Joseph said. "Four out of the six of us live in West Hartford, five out of the six of us live in the area."

Rockport Managing Partner Gary Fogg, who lives in New York, previously resided in state and graduated from the University of Connecticut.

With regard to West Hartford, Joseph said, "We live there, shop there, walk there, have meetings there; we have a personal vested interest in seeing the Center thrive. It's unique in the state of Connecticut. It's incredibly livable, shopable and walkable. All of us are really excited about it."

A vision for the Center

Since the sale went public, Fogg said many interested parties have approached the group about tenancy, but the partners have not made any quick decisions. At this point they have hired three different professional groups to aid in leasing

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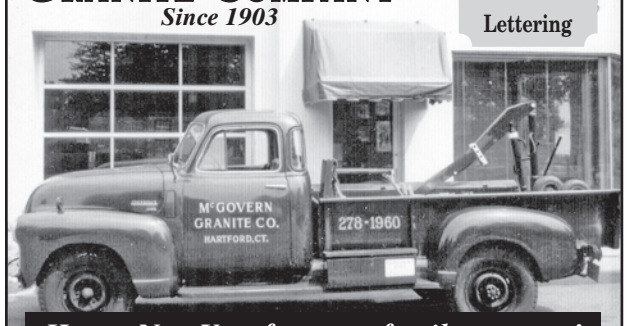

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In the Square

Blue Back sees changes of its own

by Abigail Albair
Executive Editor

Changes that began last year in Blue Back Square will continue in 2016 as the shopping and dining destination brings in new, unique tenants.

It was announced in January that Pure Barre fitness studios will open in February in the space formally occupied by a Santander Bank branch.

Bar Louie, a restaurant founded in Chicago, Illinois – with locations in more than 20 states – will open its first Connecticut location in the former Umi Sushi and long vacant Au Bon Pain space in the spring.

According to a press release from Blue Back Square, Bar Louie is "known for its social atmosphere, scratch kitchen and handcrafted signature martinis."

Pure Barre, "the nation's largest and fastest growing barre concept," will offer guests low-impact, full-body workouts.

The announcement of the new businesses comes on the heels of three closures in the Square. White House Black Market, Munson's Chocolates and Per Se Aveda all announced at the end of 2015 that they would close their Blue Back Square locations. Per Se Aveda merged with Matthew Phillips Salon at 68 LaSalle Road in the Center to create the Matthew Phillips Aveda Concept Salon.

"For every door that closes our corporate office is talking to potential tenants, both local and national."

–Elizabeth Zigmont, Blue Back marketing director

"They did well here, it's just that there leases are up," Elizabeth Zigmont, marketing director at Blue Back Square, said.

Although rumors about the potential closing of Barnes & Noble circulated as the company announced closures of other locations, Zigmont said the bookstore is not going anywhere.

"They are very happy here," she said. "It's a perfect demographic for them and we love having them. It's not just books. They offer toys, gifts and the Starbucks Café. They have a lot to offer and are definitely a valuable tenant here."

With regard to White House Black Market and Munson's, Zigmont noted that both have other locations within the West Hartford market.

"For every door that closes our corporate office is talking to potential tenants, both local and national," she said.

While the three newly vacant spaces, as well as the corner space at Memorial and Raymond Roads previously occupied by The Counter burger bar, remain open, other slots were filled by new businesses in the fall.

West Elm opened on Memorial Road just in time for the holiday season and, soon after, Middletown-based NoRA Cupcake Company opened its second location a few doors down.

NoRA Bakery and Catering Director Kim Eardley said the reception in West Hartford has been good, keeping her kitchen busy with increased demand for product.

For a full profile on Eardley read our LIFE in the Kitchen series in next month's edition of West Hartford LIFE.

The new businesses are part of a line up of various retailers in the Square, in addition to the Bow-Tie Cinema and several restaurants.

As the Square looks to fill vacant spaces, Zigmont said the goal is to attract "destination retailers."

"We're looking for whatever is the best fit that would make the most sense and be the most successful here at Blue Back Square," she said. "We want to have the right mix of retailers and restaurants."

Retailers that are unique to the area tend to work best, she said, and drive new traffic.

For up-to-date information visit http://www.bluebacksquare.com/. **WHL**

The new owners plan to make capital investments into the property façade to update the look and to brighten up the streetscape.

and management, something Fogg said "should add value to the entire process."

RM Bradley is handling the day-to-day management operations of the buildings while Charter Realty & Development, a real estate investment, development and leasing company out of southern Connecticut, is the third party leasing agency for the space.

Avison Young, a commercial real estate services firm with an office in Hartford, is helping to find the right tenants for the office space that is vacant in the buildings.

"We want to take what the Sinatros built and enhance it by investing in the properties while also engaging our three outside professional groups – Charter, Avison and RM Bradley – in management and leasing," Fogg said.

The company has been quick to address any concerns of the tenants as the new owners conduct meetings with them and become familiar with them as they look to the future.

"They were used to a very personal relationship with the Sinatros and I believe they're happy to know we're continuing that approach," Rockport managing partner Keith Guerraz said.

The former Herbs, Generation Y and Plimpton's space are some of the biggest retail spots currently vacant, and are the first places the partners will seek to fill.

"We're being urgent but patient," Guerraz said.

Joseph added. "If somebody comes to us and wants 2,000 square feet of space and we don't think they will enhance the entire center and our other tenants' businesses, we won't accept them. That's not the sense of urgency we have. We're thinking of the Center as a whole. When you do a deal like this, you finance it with an eye toward a long-term strategy, long-term leasing, and the long-term success of all parties involved in it."

Guerraz added that there is space available within the buildings of which many of the leasing brokers were unaware.

"The largest office space in West Hartford Center that is vacant is above Bricco's," he said. "Our business plan is to aggressively market the available space. Once occupied it will have a positive impact on our existing retail tenants."

As they do look to fill particularly retail space, the partners are seeking tenants who may open earlier and close later, augmenting the "morning to night lifestyle," of the Center, Brown said.

"West Hartford Center is a unique area," he said. "It's a trend across the country that these live-work-play type of environments are really in demand for various uses. West Hartford is really the best spot."

Rounding out the group of six new partners are David Raisner and Ron Webber of Tecca Ventures, both West Hartford residents. **WHL**

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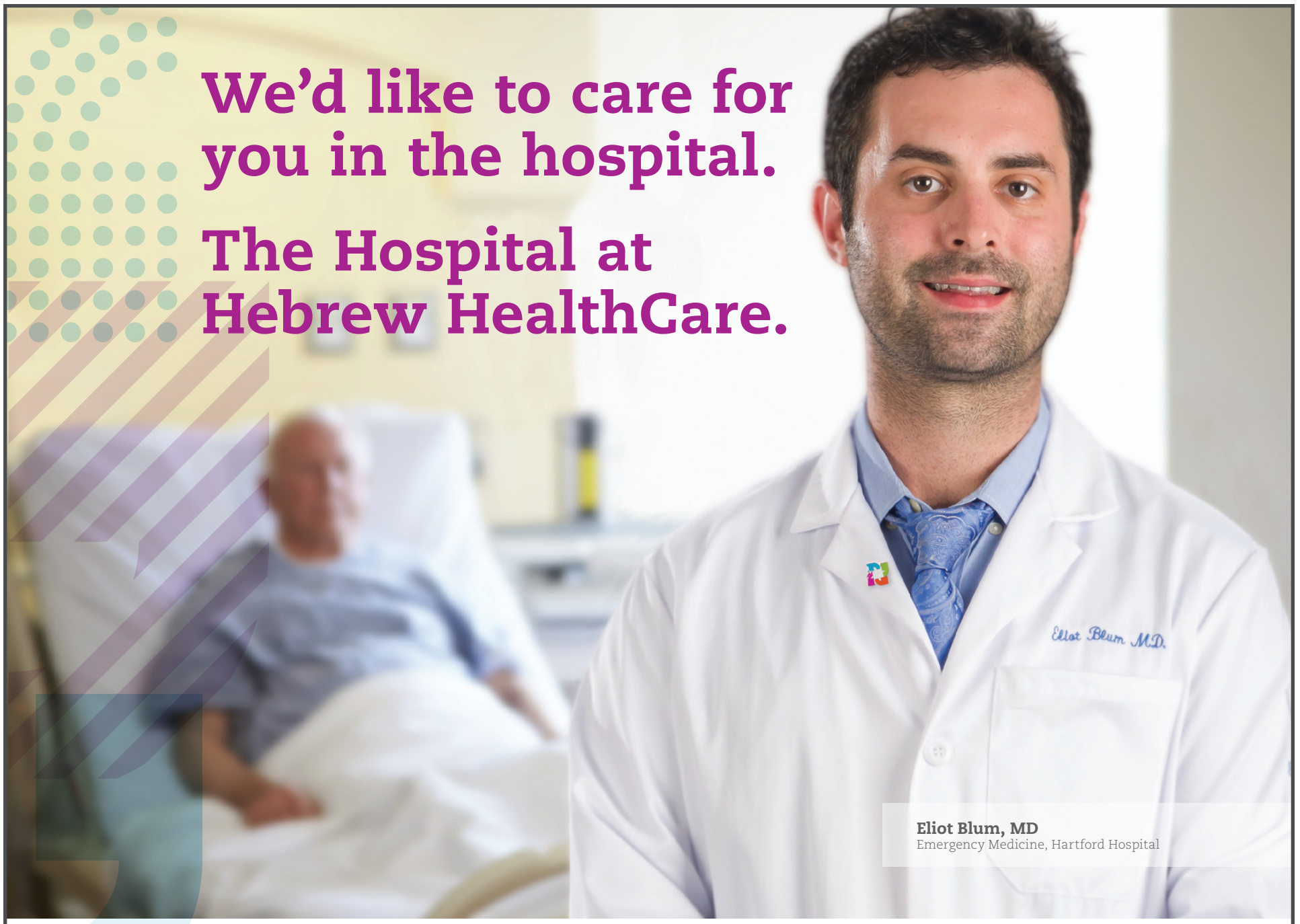

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Making peace with her past

Lorna Little details her life-changing experience in a book

by Alicia B. Smith
Staff Writer

Courtesy photo

The third phone call was the one Lorna Little was hoping to make. With this one conversation an important piece of the puzzle would be put in place, maybe.

The woman's voice on the other end of the line confirmed a name and location but she did not have any contact information.

"I was thrilled and excited," Little said of the news the woman had told her. After months of research, Little now had information to work with that could lead her to the person she was seeking.

At the age of 31, Little had inadvertently come across a document that would change her life as she knew it. Little and her family were planning to attend a family reunion in Jamaica and her former passport had expired. To apply for a new one, she needed her birth certificate. Having been born in England, it required contacting the English consulate.

The paperwork Little received from England arrived in a neatly addressed brown

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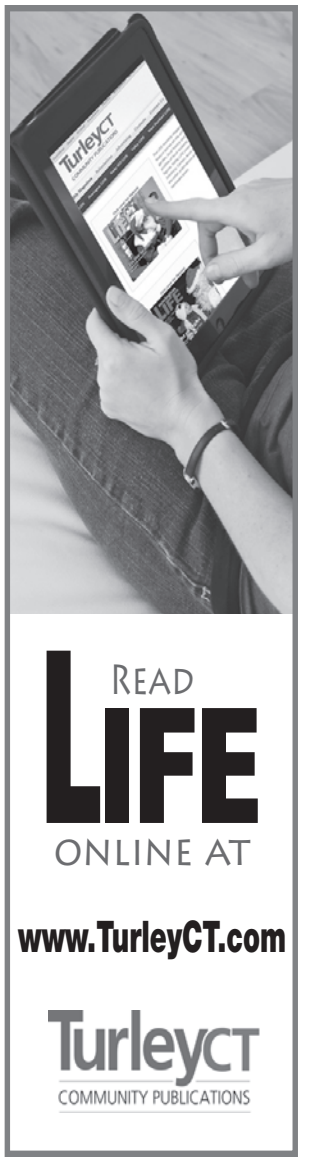


envelope. Little joked that the envelope with its stamps and overall presentation prompted her to admire the British and their classy ways.

That admiration immediately turned to disgust when she saw its contents She had not gotten the birth certificate she had requested, rather it contained an adoption certificate.

That annoyance quickly turned to astonishment as she realized, on closer inspection, that the adoption certificate was legitimate and it explained the circumstances of her origins. For her whole life, she had known her mother and father as her biological parents and here was a piece of paper informing her that everything she knew about herself was wrong.

"I'm in my early 30s, there is no way all this alternate life was going on and I'm not aware," Little said.

The experience, as shocking as it was, enabled her to discover her identity, strengthen her faith and have a better understanding of what family means.

Little has written a book about coming to terms with her new reality and the search to find her birth mother.

In "Mum's the Word!" Little shares her strategies and feelings. The title reflects her British birth mother as well as the secret that was kept regarding her very existence.

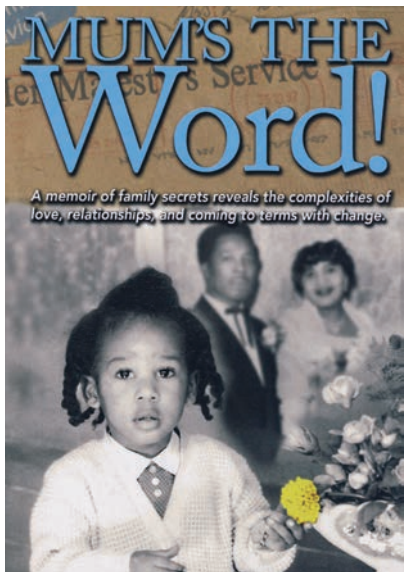
"The goal for my book, I wanted it to be able to help other people going through whatever they may be going through," she said.

Since its publication in January 2015, Little said people have shared details about their lives. Some have been adoptees, but others were dealing with issues including financial struggles, sexual abuse and domestic violence.

"That for me has been the best thing," Little said. "You can share your story and it can provide some hope and glimmer for someone else."

Adoption therapy specialist Karen Caffrey called Little's book "a story of healing, faith and love, and a shining example of how the truth will, if you follow it, set you free."

Darryl McDaniels, of the hip-hop group RUN-DMC, said, "This is a story that relates to us all. … All of our lives are full of secrets and mysteries and all of those secretes and mysteries are our truth!"


MUM'S THE
Word!
A memoir of family secrets reveals the complexities of love, relationships, and coming to terms with change.

The only person Little told immediately was her husband, Alonzo, the man she described as her best friend. She revealed it to him that day after a harrowing afternoon attending her daughter's event at school and an awkward conversation that evening with her mother, questioning the adoption certificate.

"The story is really about a journey of faith and healing. It ended with peacefulness."

–Lorna Little

Little recalled her mother said, "It's out now," and begged her not to tell anyone, per a promise she had made to Little's father.

Little's mother was reluctant to share details, but ultimately confirmed that Little's father was indeed her biological father. After they married, he had an affair with a married woman, who at the time was separated from her husband and became pregnant. After some difficulty, Little's father was able to retain custody of his daughter and his wife adopted her. The couple's attempts to start a family ended with several miscarriages before Little joined them.

By the time Little found out the circumstances of her birth, her father had passed away. Little set out to find her birth mother. She had the woman's name and saw from the adoption certificate they shared the same birthday.

"I didn't know if she was alive or dead or where in the world she was," Little said.

First, she had to get her original birth certificate. This could not be done until she had a required meeting with a counselor that would determine if she was mentally prepared for what lay ahead: the possibility that she would not find her birth mother and if she did, the woman might not be interested in hearing from her or establishing any kind of relationship.

Little was willing to take the risk and continued her correspondence with British officials to obtain more paperwork to help with her search. She also gently gleaned information from her mother and took to the Internet, which was then in its infancy.

"What was a blessing to me, when I did get some of that information is that my biological mother had a unique last name," Little said. "That was somewhat helpful, it helped me narrow [the search] a bit."

Her research unearthed a 30-year-old address and Little sent a letter there, careful to keep her wording vague.

Months went by and Little heard nothing. She then took to making phone calls.

"I looked up some information and called three people with that name," she said. "I just said, 'I am looking for a relative.'"

Her third call was to a woman in Jamaica who needed a few minutes to understand what Little was seeking.

"She pauses. 'Who are you again,' she says. 'Well, my ex-sister-in-law – that's her name and she lives in England,'" Little said, recalling the conversation.

"I was so happy," Little said. "But she had this tone in her voice; I kind of had a feeling she knew who I was."

Little also learned through this woman that she had two biological sisters living in London.

Little was able to connect with an agency in London that assists adoptees in finding their biological families. Little worked with a volunteer named Faith, something she thought was a good omen.

The agency also published a newsletter often containing details of reunion stories – both those that went well and those that did not. Little said she could not get enough of those stories.

Faith provided her with a name and an address and a gentle warning to not get expectations up.

Little sent another letter, this time including more details and writing that she believed the recipient to be

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Lorna Little had no idea she was adopted until she found some paperwork – an action that turned her life upside down, but ultimately lead her to a peaceful place.

her birth mother and that she was only trying to understand the circumstances of her birth. She also included a high school photo of herself.

"I know now maybe the words were strong," Little said of this letter. "I wanted to know how she was able to give me away and keep two other children."

Three weeks later, Little got a letter back. This time it did not arrive in a brown envelope, but a blue airmail one. It was from her birth mother who began her letter with the words "Hello my dearest Lorna."

Little wrote in her book that in that letter, her birth mother "indicated she had suffered over the years through all of this."

Little went on to write, "Through all of this I had learned I had not been forgotten."

Her birth mother also admitted that, according to Little, "She knew in her heart I would find out."

The Sunday after receiving this important letter was Mother's Day and Little woke up early with numerous feelings. She was the mother of two daughters, Alicia and Ashley, and her discovery had churned up many emotions, including from the perspective of being a mother herself.

On this day Little happened to turn on the television and caught a portion of a movie about a woman searching for her biological mother. She went on to attend church with her husband and two daughters, hearing a message from her pastor on mothering.

"I was really listening that day," Little said of the words from the pulpit. "That day the anger towards my adoptive mother began to dissipate; I released that."

When she got home, the phone rang. Her husband answered it. It was her birth mother.

When Little picked up the receiver the woman on the other end said, "Hello darling, how are you?"

Being British, her biological mother was not aware that Mother's Day was being celebrated in the United States.

"It took me a minute to comprehend who I was actually talking to; having to reorient myself to the reality I was now living in. Oh my goodness, it was my biological mother! She continued talking and the experience was honestly somewhat uncomfortable at first, being caught off guard for something I would have rehearsed much more for had I known she was calling," Little wrote of this phone call.

The two women continued their correspondence for a year before Little, with her husband's support, traveled to England to meet her.

It was at this point that she revealed to her mother that she had been in touch with her birth mother and was planning on meeting her.

"Surprisingly she actually did not seem upset," Little wrote. "I got the impression that talking about the past with her was more difficult than moving forward through a relationship with Margaret. With her blessing, I could now fully commit myself to the journey ahead."

"What was a blessing to me, when I did get some of that information, is that my biological mother had a unique last name."

– Lorna Little

Since that reunion, when she was able to meet her sisters, Little has continued to keep in contact with her biological family. Her two sisters even traveled to the States – one came over for Little's daughter's wedding and her other sister came when Little received her graduate degree. They were both introduced as a relative from England, as Little was willing to continue keeping the secret her mother had insisted upon.

In the December 2015 issue of O Magazine, there is a piece from Little in which she described the best gift she had received – a scrapbook full of family photos and information on her biological mother that her sister had made. It was accompanied by a handwritten note from her sister relating what was going on in their mother's life. There were also photos and details about other relatives that Little had no idea she had.

"It was beautiful because it filled in so many gaps, it gave me insight," Little said of the gift.

At the time Little and her biological mother were reunited, Little was the only one of her children who had children of her own, making her biological mother a grandmother.

"The story is really about a journey of faith and healing," Little said. "It ended with peacefulness."

In 2004, Little was inspired to look over her journals and decided to write a book, but there was information she had agreed not to share. She thought perhaps she could change just enough details so no one would know it was a story about her and her family, but that did not feel right, Little said.

Just before her mother passed away, Little told her that she was writing a book, and to her surprise, Little said her adoptive mother said she could go forward with her story.

Prior to her becoming ill, Little's mother made a trip to England. She was able to meet Little's biological mother and Little said the two were able to make amends with one another and spent time together.

"At the end of the day, they came to a place that their choices ended up being the best thing for me," Little said.

While on this trip, Little's adoptive mother became ill. Little could not fly over and accompany her home so one of her biological sisters made the trip back to the States.

"That was just so amazing for her to do that," Little said.

The day after Little's mother passed away, Little received a call from her biological mother, who had called her just two days prior. When questioned why she was calling again so soon, Little said her biological mother had no idea her mother had just died, but knew that something had happened and her daughter could use some reassuring words.

Little was born in England and at about the age of 6 her family moved to Hartford where she grew up. She attended local schools and graduated from Hartford Public High.

Little was a teenager mother and went on to marry the father of her child. The two have been married for 28 years. She and her family have lived in West Hartford for the past 16 years.

Little earned her undergraduate degree from Central State University and a master's from Springfield College. Today she is the executive director of St. Agnes Home, a facility for teenage mothers. Little said that her goal throughout her life is to make a positive difference in someone else's life.

Little has learned from discovering her origins to be more empathetic. She said she has a better understanding of what a mother may be experiencing when she makes a decision to put her child up for adoption, a lesson she learned from her biological mother. From the woman who raised her, she learned of the pain that couples facing infertility experience.

"It gives me a broader perspective of motherhood in general," she said.

She has come to realize that both adoptive and biological mothers struggle with the decisions they make.

In her current position, Little said she has had people come to St. Agnes Home inquiring after their birth mother.

"When those things started happening more, I started to feel that connection," she said.

In the prologue of her book Little wrote: "This book will provide you with hope as you journey through my trials and tribulations, experiencing surprises while uncovering secrets, as I return to them as they often return to me. After this experience, you too will exhale cathartically; having the knowledge that humankind can make it through anything."

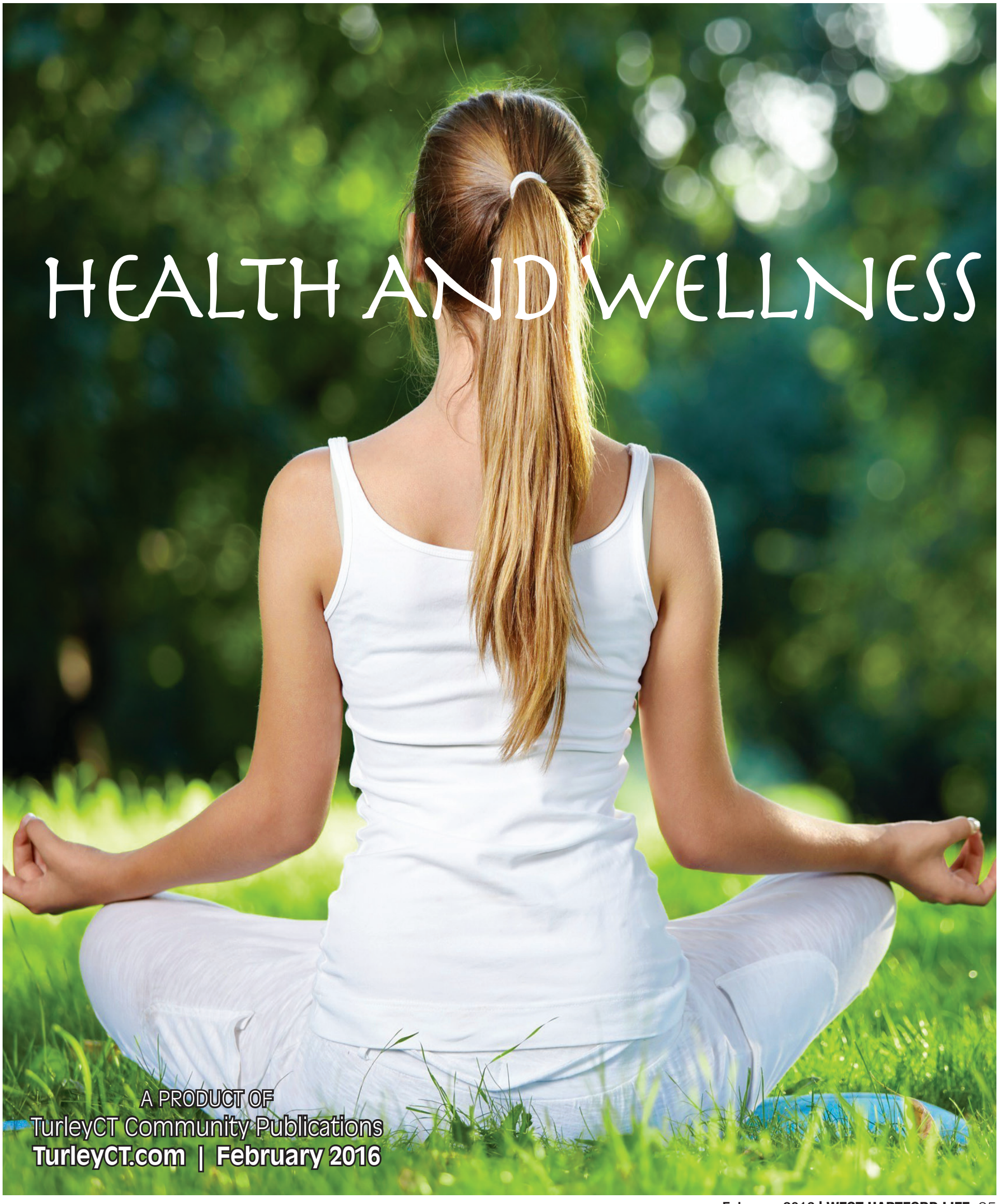
Friends and colleagues attending the launch party knew she had authored a book, but they were not aware of the content.

"People were stunned," Little, a normally private person, said, "No one knew [adoption] was part of my life."

"There were tears in the room, positive support. At that point I was free of the secret," she said.

The party was held on her birthday in January, and she spent 2015 giving book talks and holding signings. **WHL**

More information can be found at www.mumsthewordbook.com.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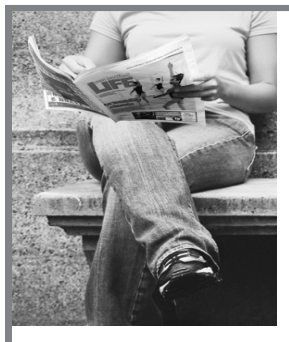
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Have a heart

Residents bounce back from health scares

by Mara Dresner
Staff Writer

Sometimes major health events come out of the blue. Other times, the symptoms have been building for years, but we don't always know that they're a disaster in the making. These area residents have all faced major heart issues and are doing great on the other side. In honor of American Heart Month, they've shared their stories.

Name: Carolyn Levine
Age: 71
Hometown: West Hartford
Occupation: professional conservator and certified geriatric care manager
Success story:
My job was quite stressful and I had high blood pressure. I was on medication for it, but I was very active. I never saw this coming.

We were at a friend's house for the evening playing cards and there were 12 of us or so and I just didn't feel that great. We went home and I was getting into bed and I got a terrible pain in back of my neck. So, I laid down on the bed and my husband called the doctor, a friend of ours, and he said, "Give her five minutes and if it happens again, go to the emergency room."

That's what we did. That was the first sign of anything. That's probably when the aortic aneurysm dissected. I went into the emergency room at about 11 at night and they started doing all kinds of tests, but nothing was showing up. My husband finally went home at 4 or 5 in the morning. I said, "Go get my clothes and my cell phone. I'll be going home in the morning."

The thoracic surgeon and cardiologist were there looking over all the records and they said, "You know what? I have one more test to do and if it's what I think it is, she'll need to go right into surgery. Only 1 percent of people survive a dissected aortic aneurysm. Even if she does come out of surgery, she'll be compromised because of the lack of oxygen. She will not be the person you know." That's how they left it with my husband and adult son and daughter, and 13 hours, later I came out of surgery.

While in cardiac intensive care, I was a code blue. I stopped breathing and they had to re-intubate me. By the third week, they put me in the step-down cardiac unit. I had no idea until I was ready to go to rehab what really happened to me. I went to Mount Sinai Rehab/Saint Francis, I think for 12 days. When I started rehab, I wasn't really walking well at all and I kept falling asleep. In the first exercise, I had to take soft alphabet blocks and put them in order and I had no idea how to do that.

I had always been doing water aerobics. When I was healed and after I had physical therapy in my home, I went back to the water aerobics. I didn't have the appetite that I used to. I'd lost probably 35 pounds during all of this. I just had no taste for anything except one friend would make me carrot soup and I loved that and chicken soup and that's what my diet was for a long time.

I'm doing great! Except if I talk too much, I do start coughing because my nerves were damaged in my throat from all the intubation, so my voice has changed a little bit. I have some swallowing issues. Other than that, I am perfectly fine.

When I got home from rehab, I started calling my clients; they're all elderly and they knew something had happened to me. I would talk to them on the phone and finally, I started going to visit them. I'm working

full time. I remember all my clients and all their stories and I just love them. It's a rebirth; it's a miracle. I wear a bracelet all the time that says "blessed."

Name: Linda Nadeau
Age: 66
Hometown: Farmington
Occupation: homemaker
Success story:
My regular doctor did blood work with my physical, and my cholesterol was really high, well over 300. He wanted me to go on statins and I just refused to do that. I got a card in the mail that [Bradley Biskup, a physician assistant at UConn Health's Calhoun Cardiology Center] was doing a talk on cholesterol and lowering cholesterol. I was really impressed by everything he said. After it was over, I went up and asked if he sees people privately. I made an appointment; that was maybe two years ago.

We went over all my blood work and my history. He told me what supplements to take and when to take them. I take vitamin D and for cholesterol, Choleast (red yeast rice), also calcium and fish oil. To help bring down the triglycerides, he said fiber is really important, so he suggested Metamucil, but any type of fiber is very important.

As far as exercise, he helped me with that. He said to do the "talk test." I was a runner and I am a runner. He said whenever I'm doing any exercise at all I should be able to say my name and address.

I've just been taking the supplements he recommended and eating healthier than I had been prior. I've had amazing results. I think he is great. He does things naturally and tries not to have patients take the statins. He said if we had to go that route, we would, but we have not. It's gone down a lot; it's gone down more than 100 points. I was seeing him every three months at first and now it's every six months.

I have more energy. I exercise six days a week. I do running and I do boot camp. I do something six days a week. And my blood pressure is low. I think it's all related to working with him. He's amazing. Everything he's told me to do has been nothing but helpful.

Name: Bonnie Gearin
Age: 71
Hometown: Farmington
Occupation: retired first and second grade teacher
Success story:
My mom died at the age of 50. There are heart problems on both sides of my parents' families, so I had always been conscious of this.

I had the heart attack in February 2003. In September/October (2002), all of us that taught little ones caught bronchitis. Everyone got rid of it; mine just lingered. I kept going back to the doctor. I became such a pest. I kept saying, "Are you sure this is not heart-related?" He treated me for pneumonia, for bronchitis. He diagnosed me with asthma and gave me an inhaler.

I was at Our Lady of Calvary Retreat, which is probably four minutes away from UConn [Health]. On Sunday morning, I felt short of breath, so I used the inhaler, which was not a good thing to use. I went up to mass, and Sister Ann said, "You look as white as ghost. Do I need to call 911?" I did not even hesitate. I said yes. I can't give you a reason. I knew there was something big going on.

There were two retreatants that weekend who were not scheduled to be there, two doctors from Long Island. They immediately came out and felt it was heart-related. That was a gift that they were there. I went to the emergency room and they did all the blood work they do. Dr. David Hager in the cardiology department just happened to be available. He said to me, "I would really like to keep you overnight." I needed to get a substitute teacher. I had all the paper goods for a teacher breakfast the next day. I asked if I could go home and come back. I was all dressed to go, and he said they were going to keep me overnight. At 4 in the morning, I had what they

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Eat better
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Lose weight
When you shed extra fat and unnecessary pounds, you reduce the burden on your heart, lungs, blood vessels and skeleton. You give yourself the gift of active living, you lower your blood pressure and you help yourself feel better, too.

Stop smoking
Cigarette smokers have a higher risk of developing cardiovascular disease. If you smoke, quitting is the best thing you can do for your health.

call "the widow maker." The only reason I survived was I was already in the hospital; I was already in the cardiac unit.

Dr. Hager happened to have stayed in the hospital because he was there within seconds. Women need to know you might have a heart attack and not even know it. I was going to get a T-shirt that said, "I had a heart attack and I never even had a pain." Dr. Hager put a stent in to open an artery that was 100 percent blocked and another was 75 or 80 percent blocked. UConn cardiology is absolutely phenomenal. That's a good part of the reason I made such a healthy comeback. The care was outstanding.

I was in the hospital five days. I did go back to work. I made exercise a definite part of my day, and I shed some pounds. I did change my lifestyle. I was working on my master's at the same time. I was going to school, coping with teenagers, teaching, my eating habits were probably the worst. Burger King was where I stopped on the way home.

I see a physician's assistant every three or four months just to keep tabs on things. I exercise; I really try to adhere to the Mediterranean diet as close as possible. I feel great. The last time I was at a cardiology appointment, the doctor told me if I saw a doctor who did not know I'd had a heart attack, that doctor would not be able to pick it up by listening to my heart. That heart attack did a lot of damage to my heart. The fact I'm not exhibiting any evidence of having a heart attack, all in all, I think it's a pretty miraculous experience. **WHL**

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Health & *Wellness*

Finding *balance*

Experts offer thoughts on different approaches to wellness

by Allie Rivera
Staff Writer

Whether the body is in pain that needs to be addressed or one seeks to develop a better mind and body connection, there are different ways to approach overall health and to give the body what it needs.

Physical Therapy

Eric Milman, co-owner of the Physical Therapy Center of Rocky Hill, said he takes a slightly different approach to wellness than other physical therapists.

"Our philosophy is a little bit outside of the box of most physical therapists," he said. "We really try to figure out what mechanism is causing the pain."

Milman compared the view he and his partner, John Paholski, take on taking care of their bodies to car maintenance.

"It's like taking your car in for an inspection," he explained. "You want to find out what may lead to a break down in the future."

By looking at the whole body, and not only the part that is in pain, Milman said he can help to treat the ailment more efficiently and with long effects.

"Take for example if someone comes in with shoulder pain," he said. "It could be that your spine isn't flexible enough, so when you reach up for things you feel it in your shoulder."

By looking for the causes of pain throughout the entire body, Milman said he and his partner can work to erase pain and not just manage it.

"If your car is leaking oil, you can keep adding oil to it, but it hasn't changed the leak," he said.

At his practice, Milman said that each patient is looked at individually and has a program specifically developed for them. All appointments are one-on-one, with the physical therapist allowing the professional to watch their clients as they complete their exercises.

"We think it's important to give them that one-on-one attention to make sure they are completing it correctly," Milman said. "Even if it's

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Health & *Wellness*

a simple exercise, if you aren't doing it correctly, it's just a waste of time."

According to Milman, this approach to wellness has many benefits, the largest of which being the ability to treat the cause of pain and discomfort instead of only the symptoms.

"We would like to think that one of the benefits is well-being going forward," he said. "Hopefully, that person will get better and not need more therapy down the road."

Low-Impact

For many people looking to increase their exercise, finding a low impact approach is necessary.

"Sometime the fitness world tends to think that pushing harder is always better, but Pilates has the approach that working smarter is better," Jessica Fritz-Peters, owner of Pilates Defined in West Hartford, said.

"You don't have to jump around to get a great workout," Susan Valente, owner of Core Barre and Pilates Studio in Newington, said. "[Pilates] works the body safely and efficiently."

Initially developed as a form of rehabilitation, Pilates is a low-impact approach to wellness that has participants engaging their core muscles and can be easily individualized for the greatest results.

Another approach that Valente teaches at her studio is barre, a ballet-inspired workout that Valente similarly describes as low- or no-impact.

In addition to the effects that these programs have during a class or one-on-one session, Pilates instructor Maggie Down, owner of Personal Euphoria Pilates in Wethersfield, said that these types of exercise can have an impact on daily life.

"To me, one of the biggest benefits of Pilates is that it teaches you how to use your body properly, so whether you're walking, lifting laundry or just sitting at your desk, you're more in-tune with your body," she said.

"It's trying to make you aware of your body in all these different positions so you can transfer that to anything life may throw at you."

Both Valente and Fritz-Peters said they have seen similar benefits with their clients.

"It really comes down to strength and safety," Valente said. "The stronger you are, the safer you are in your body."

Body and soul

When it comes to overall health, physical wellbeing is tied to our emotional wellbeing.

"There's some new research out that's very validating for what we do about how our body and our mind connections are so interrelated," said Sandy Byrne, owner of River Rock Yoga in Wethersfield. "The better I can feel and know my body, the more healthy I will be both emotionally and physically."

Because human beings hold stress physically, tension results.

"If we feel victorious, our bodies are open," Byrne said.

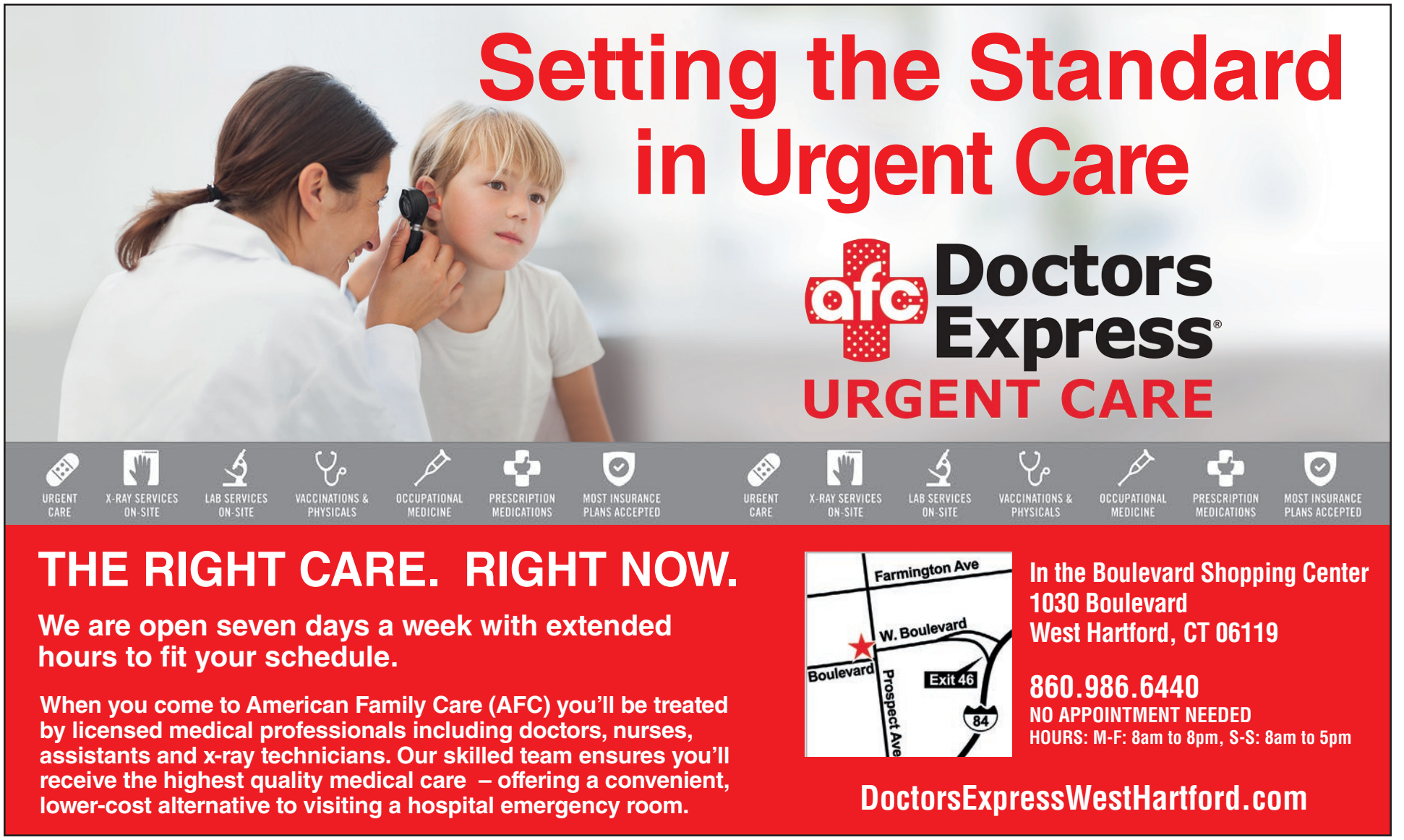
Jen Leavitt, studio manager at West Hartford Yoga, agrees.

"Yoga is the process of connecting breathing and movement, so it also is an opportunity to really start listening to your body, It's really part of a whole mindfulness experience."

Yoga has the potential to bring about a sense of calm, Leavitt said, and to help people become more in tune with their bodies.

"Yoga as we use the term in the western world means a lot of different things to a lot of different people," she said. "Keep working until you find what fits and know that there's really something for everyone." **WHL**

Physical Therapy Center of Rocky Hill is located at 1975 Silas Deane Highway, Rocky Hill. It can be reached at 860-513-1431. West Hartford Yoga is located at 23 Brook Street, West Hartford. It can be reached at 860-953-9642 or online at www.westhartfordyoga.com. River Rock Yoga is located at 274 Silas Deane Highway, Wethersfield. It can be reached at 860-757-3339 or at www.rryoga.com. Pilates Defined is located at 1143 New Britain Avenue, West Hartford. It can be reached at 860-899-1515. Core Barre and Pilates Studio is located at 85 Market Square, Newington. It can be reached at 860-938-8751. Personal Euphoria is located at 400 Hartford Avenue, Wethersfield. It can be reached at 860-748-7574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Health & *Wellness*

Five ways to stay mentally *strong*

by Alison Jalbert
Assistant Editor

New Year's resolutions often include pledges to improve on physical strength, which is important, but an equally important area to work on is mental strength. Being mentally strong can provide benefits in all areas of life.

Jayne Dean, a licensed marriage and family therapist and practicing psychotherapist at West Hartford Counseling Center, said there are many different aspects that make a person mentally healthy.

"They all relate to each other," she said. "If you pick one area, usually the other areas will begin to change."

Here are five ways to increase mental strength.

Take care of yourself. Basic things such as getting enough sleep, eating well and exercising are all key to being mentally strong, Dean said. It's also important to include quiet time in life, whether it's meditation, reflection, prayer, or simply taking time to rest.

Be aware of your emotions. Dean said "an expressed feeling is a managed feeling," meaning a person is able to identify what they are feeling and put it into words, either for themselves or to someone else.

Gary Catania

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That helps manage stress and deal with emotional charges that happen in the body.

Identify bad habits and work toward breaking them. A habit is usually a way of managing stress or dealing with a need, Dean explained.

The path to eliminating that can be difficult, but it begins with a person recognizing they want to make a change and considering what need is met by what they're doing, whether it's smoking, overeating, drinking, compulsive exercising or rigidity.

"It begins there – having some compassion for yourself as to how that need came into existence," Dean said. "It starts with befriending and learning about the habit. That contemplation period is a very, very important part of the process. There are actually things happening in your brain to shift the pattern."

Habits can't necessarily be broken overnight, but starting to shift the way in which it's thought about shifts what a person can do about it, then the actual physical changes that need to be made will eventually happen.

Have a strong social network. This is important for mental strength because it enables a person to be able to express themselves to another person, Dean said. It also means there are people around to do pleasurable activities with, and there are positive events planned on the calendar. Having a strong social circle also makes it easier to reach out and ask for help when it's needed.

Grow by encountering the new. Seeking out and encountering new experiences, along with learning a new skill, trying something new, or simply mixing up a routine can help with mental strength.

"We can all get habituated into automatically doing the same things the same way at the same time," Dean said.

"[Changing routines] can help build those mental muscles. Mix up those patterns, mix up those things that you do every day."

This does a lot neurologically.

"Doing things new and different allows more information to bubble up, to become available and guide you in everyday life." WHL

"We can all get habituated into automatically doing the same things the same way at the same time," Dean said. "[Changing routines] can help build those mental muscles. Mix up those patterns, mix up those things that you do every day."

– Jayne Dean, a licensed marriage and family therapist and practicing psychotherapist at West Hartford Counseling Center

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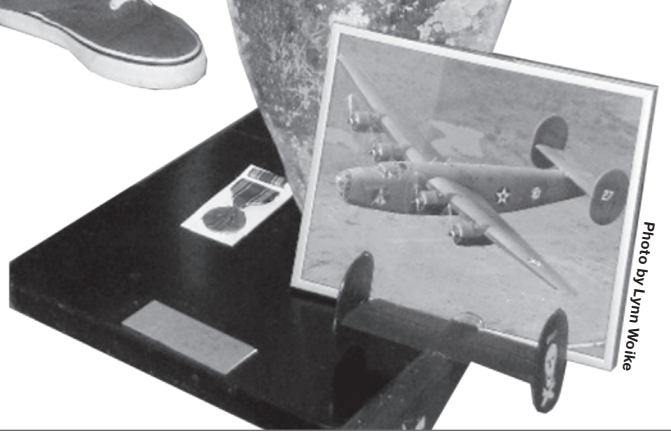

Bob Gross has medals and a propeller blade to remind him of the time he spent with the 34th Bomb Crew in World War II.

Photo by Lynn Woike

Close calls

Bob Gross honored by French government for World War II contributions

by Lynn Woike
Editor

"There's probably 10,000 stories like mine," said Bob Gross, a navigator who served in the 34th Bomb Crew of the 7th Squadron during World War II.

One story involves a propeller from the B-24 that stands in the corner of his living room. It is also one reminder of how lucky he was to survive.

Gross left college in January 1942; he was 22 years old. He attended flight school in Arizona, soloing at 26 hours, but washing out when it came to performing acrobatics. Eventually he ended up at a navigation base in San Marcus, Texas, was commissioned in December 1943 and sent to Blythe, California where the 34th Bomb Group was being reorganized.

"We trained there," he said. "The interesting thing is we never had any formation flying in the States. And then we left like March of '44 to Lincoln, Nebraska, where we picked up a new B-24 … the largest individual aircraft made in World War II," known as the Liberator.

"Did you know," he added as an aside, "that Henry Ford produced a B-24 almost every hour? He built a whole new factory. He had an assembly line. … That's the reason we were able to win the war – 'cause we were able to replace our equipment so fast."

His plane, Gross said, "was called the Misery Agent," explaining, "Our bombardier was a sports editor and writer for the Detroit News and he always had the premonition that we were never coming back."

The bombardier was right.

Gross flew three missions with that original crew. The crew's fourth mission was June 6, 1944. He didn't fly with them that day.

"Since we were just going across the channel … you didn't have a full gas load. You had a full bomb load, 6,000 pounds of bombs. They got over France. They didn't have the tools you have today. They couldn't see the target. Now you have thousands of planes in the air and in the channel, you had thousands of boats. So [the pilot] only had one way to go, you have to fly down to the south of France" and southwest to Portsmouth, England. "They were trying to ditch it in what is called the Bay of Pool. They ran out of gas and went into the forest. They were all killed. The pilot was decapitated," Gross said. "That was my first bit of luck."

For a number of years, Gross was listed in some places as killed in action when it was actually a member of the ground crew who was killed. Navigators weren't needed that day because there was a steady stream of planes to follow, and Jerry Helget had volunteered to go on that mission to operate the nose turret.

"I never knew until 1997 that he was on the plane," Gross said.

That was the year he got a call from "two young kids" who used a metal detector they had made to uncover more debris from the crash site in the Olde Woode at Corfe Castle. Gross flew to England and was offered the propeller blade they found. It is now mounted and stands in the corner of his living room. On the floor in front of it is a model of the B-24 – made by a friend who is a retired brigadier general – and a photo from the war.

Gross sometimes wondered, if he had been on the plane that day, if he could have saved the crew by convincing the pilot to put out a Mayday call and land at the closest field.

Next, Gross joined the crew of the Belchin' Bessie. He had his next close call on his second or third flight with them. It was July 1944. Their plane was third in line for takeoff, loaded with 52 100-pound bombs and 2,700 gallons of fuel. Only the pilot and co-pilot had seats; he was standing behind them.

"We got about 50 feet off the ground; we didn't have enough airspeed and we came down like that," Gross said, using his hands to demonstrate the crash.

"Next thing that happened, we had friction fire. It burned all the hair

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off the back of my head. The top turret came down on my back, pushed me in the radio equipment, then the next thing I know, I was in the hospital."

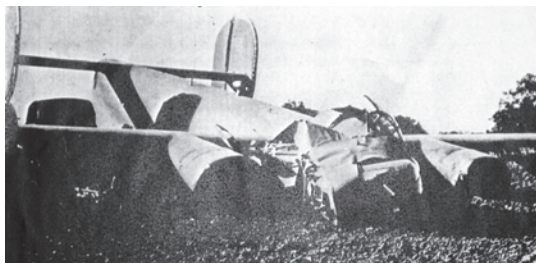
Showing a picture of the crumpled aircraft, he said, "You wonder how anyone could survive. We're lucky that someone turned the [engine] switch off or I wouldn't be here. We'd all be gone."

After a couple of days in the hospital, Gross said, "I walked out. They didn't discharge me. I knew that if I didn't fly, I'd never fly again; I wouldn't have the nerve to do it. ... I could hardly walk, but I was determined to go back to flying."

That same month, his wife, Cynthia, who was living with her parents in West Hartford, had some luck of her own; she attended the Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey Circus with her sister the day before a fire killed 167 people and injured 700 more.

Gross had more close calls, including a mission when a bomb did not release.

"We had a bomb hanging [by one of its two clamps]. The firing pin is out and now it is a live bomb. So I'll never forget this. That's why you've got to be young. The bombardier says, 'You hold on to my parachute harness and we'll go out on the bomb bay.' The two of us are coming back over France and I'm holding on to his harness and he's out there. ... He had a long stick and he tried to release the clamp so the bomb would drop ... and the bomb came down. So luckily we didn't go down with it."



TOP: The crash of Belchin' Bessie landed Bob Gross in the hospital.

LEFT: Bob Gross and his sister, Lina, pose at Fort Dix in 1942.

Then there was a flight where one of the propellers "was running away," causing the plane to shake and forcing it to leave the formation. Offered the opportunity to bail out over the English Channel, the crew opted to stay with the aircraft and successfully landed at an English base, Gross said.

Another close call came on the ground about 8 p.m. one evening. Two German fighters fell in behind a formation of returning American aircraft.

"They knocked two of our planes down and I can still see one plane coming down in complete flames right into our equipment room, killing the whole crew. I can still see the plane coming right over our heads."

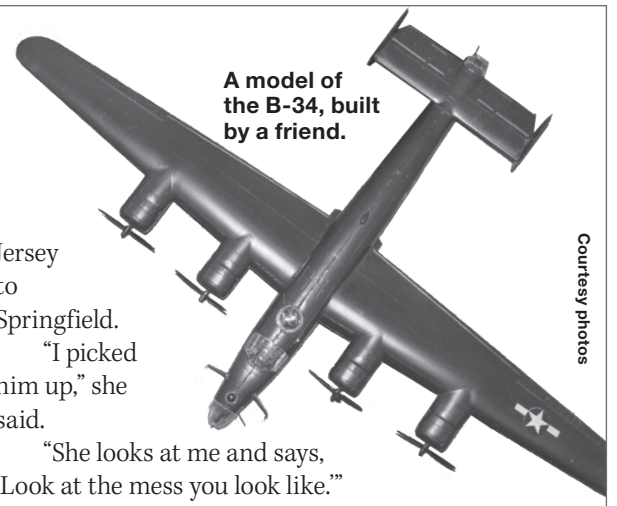
In all, Gross flew 33 missions over Germany, France and Belgium.

His last was to a submarine base in Germany. During that flight, flack came through the plane's skin and embedded in the parachute on his back.

"It just missed me," he said.

Together with his wife, they told the story of his return to the States.

Gross described the convoy of ships crossing the Atlantic Ocean and the train ride from New Jersey to Springfield.



A model of the B-34, built by a friend.

Courtesy photos

"I picked him up," she said.

"She looks at me and says, 'Look at the mess you look like.'"

"It's true," she said. "I said, 'You need new shoes. You need a haircut. You look terrible."

Both laughed.

Once back in the States, Gross began calling and writing letters, trying to connect with the families of his original crew. As the years passed, he flew to Texas, Minneapolis, Colorado and Florida to tell all that he knew to the widows, children and other family members of four from that crew. The other five were not to be found.

Gross was appointed as Chevalier of the Legion of Honor by the president of the French Republic last November for his "contribution to the liberation of our country during World War II." His son accepted the honor on his behalf at a ceremony in New York City.

Dr. Nancy Toombs, whose father served in the same bomber squadron, was responsible for him receiving the honor, Gross said.

"I got a call," he said, explaining she wanted to know why he hadn't applied for the recognition and telling him what needed to be done.

The medal is now with others he received: the Distinguished Flying Cross, a Purple Heart, an Air Medal (for flying 20 missions) with three stars (each representing five missions) and the European Theatre of Operations medal with four battle stars.

All are framed and reside next to the propeller.

While the medals are an honor, Gross is most proud of the fact his oldest son, Andrew, served in the 101st Airborne infantry in Vietnam.

"That's rare. Very few families are like mine," he said of having a father and a son in two different wars, both coming home alive.

When he left college, Gross had been studying banking and finance. After the war, he began working for his father in the state's first recycling company – a company his grandfather started in 1889. Later he went into the waste paper business; his company, Gross Paper Corp., initiated the first regional recycling program for newspaper. Gross also served 12 years on the Town Council, was deputy mayor under Nan Streeter and Chuck Mattie, and has been active in numerous organizations including the Hebrew Home and Congregation Beth Israel. **WHL**

Business notes

Hanna Andersson opens first retail store in Connecticut

Children's lifestyle brand Hanna Andersson opened at Westfarms in December, making it the first retail store in Connecticut. It is on the upper level near center court and next to Tory Burch. The Westfarms location features the company's new store concept, which incorporates one-of-a-kind homemade and crafted elements into the design by partnering with artisans and crafters from around the world to create unique pieces.

A Little Something Bakery to reopen with retail space

Beth Bolton, owner of A Little Something Bakery closed shop at 485 New Park Avenue at the end of December. She said soon after that she was considering her options to rebrand and return to business after a January hiatus. Bolton first opened the bakery on Park Road and moved to The Shops at 485 New Park in 2015 due to financial challenges. Previously a retail location, the bakery focused on made-to-order baked goods. Bolton said she has decided to use a sabbatical to rearrange the bakery to accommodate retail space.

Center Framing relocates

Center Framing and Art is now at 968 Farmington Avenue, moving from 56 LaSalle Road, where it opened in December 1974. In December, it was announced that the Sinatro Brothers had sold 52-84 LaSalle to LaSalle Road Partners, which prompted the move, according to owner Lori Chozick. The new location, next to Max's Oyster Bar, boasts a more modern vibe with high ceilings and wide wood floors. Although the store's mainstay is picture framing, it also hosts a gallery of local artists.

Fleet Feet honored

The Connecticut Retail Merchants Association honored four of the state's retail businesses for their responsiveness to customers, superior business practices and outstanding community involvement. At the organization's annual awards luncheon November 18, Fleet Feet Sports was recognized for Excellence in Customer & Community Service.

Socceropolis comes to West Hartford

Socceropolis, an educational soccer program for elementary school-aged children, is now in West Hartford. Milton Ortega founded the program in 1997 in Santa Monica, California. It focuses on the foundation of skills and love for the game, teaching basic fundamentals such as dribbling, trapping, passing and shooting. Soccer classes and a camp will be held in the spring, along with a half-hour Parent and Me program for aspiring players ages 2 ½ to 3 ½. For more information on Socceropolis, visit www.socceropolis.com.

Cookshop Plus opens on Farmington Avenue

After finding success in Australia with their store Cookshop Plus, Joanne and Terry Ryan, along with their daughter Samantha Hines and her husband, James, sought a location in America. Cookshop Plus opened at 977 Farmington Avenue in December, offering a selection of tableware, bakeware, cookware, barware, cutlery, glassware and a variety of complementing pieces. The store includes a coffee bar in partnership with NEAT Coffee out of Darien. (Read a full story on page 46.) **WHL**

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EDUCATION

I've been accepted! Now what?

Next steps for parents and students after receiving acceptance letters

by Alison Jalbert
Assistant Editor

An envelope with a college return address appears in the mailbox, bearing good news.

"Welcome to the Class of 2020!"

Receiving a letter – or letters – of acceptance is a great feeling after the rigors of filling out applications, taking standardized tests and a slew of college visits. The work isn't done there, though.

Whether it's choosing which college to commit to or taking additional action after committing, local experts offer advice for parents and students.

Regardless if a final decision on a school has been made, the focus should be on financial aid preparation. Filling out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid, otherwise known as FAFSA, is critical, explained Jeffrey Noll

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EDUCATION

of College Planning of Connecticut in West Hartford. Some private schools also require a CSS/Financial Aid Profile along with the FAFSA.

Students should receive financial aid awards not long after getting acceptance letters. Noll said both parents and students should review the award.

"Unfortunately, a lot of folks don't know how to do that," he said. "Awards from a school can be a bit confusing [and people] don't know if they can go back to the school and ask for more money. ... Most financial aid awards will come with different components against student loans, such as work study."

It is important to be realistic from a financial aid perspective about the affordability of college, Noll said. Parents have to have conversations with their students about what tuition is and isn't reasonable.

"Students are going to get student loans. The rest comes out of pocket from parents; if they don't have it, they're going to have to borrow money," he said. "UConn is approaching $25,000 to $30,000 a year if you're living in Storrs. Some of the private schools have sticker prices upwards of $65,000. ... I always tell kids never just look at the state schools that are 'cheaper' – sometimes you'll pay less for a private education than you would for a state school."

"Awards from a school can be a bit confusing [and people] don't know if they can go back to the school and ask for more money."

– Jeffrey Noll of College Planning of CT

"According to the Department of Education, more than 80 percent of Americans need financial aid for college. That's a pretty significant group," he said.

Looking for outside scholarships is an important undertaking. Noll recommends www.fastweb.com. Some companies offer a fee to do a scholarship search for students, but he cautions against that.

Financial planning should begin as soon as possible; Noll encourages parents not to wait until financial aid forms are due to start worrying about it.

Nilvio Perez, associate director of the Office of Recruitment & Admissions at Central Connecticut State University, said students applying for financial aid or other scholarships should be aware that deadlines vary between institutions, as well as the federal government and each state.

Students should also go on secondary visits to colleges to which they have been accepted.

"Most students visit prior to applying or prior to receiving a decision. Once a student has been admitted, the thought is, 'Well, I've seen the school already,'" Perez said. "It's a great idea to visit – now you're

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- Spring 2016 Session: March 1st to April 26th
- Spring Sessions meet once a week on Tuesdays for 8 weeks.
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EDUCATION

visiting with a different purpose. Now, you're seeing if this is the best place to enroll."

He suggests speaking with financial aid officers, academic advisers, career and internship centers and current students while on campus, even if those conversations happened during the first visit.

"Now, it's more of a detailed conversation. You're comparing this particular school ... to another school you've been admitted to," he said.

Larry DeJohn, Ed.D., owner and consultant at College Planning Consulting on the Hartford/West Hartford line, said students should be prepared to look at the culture and environment of a college during a second visit.

They should also become more familiar with the campus and learn more about the curriculum, the cafeteria and extracurricular activities, among other things, before the official orientation.

"Go when students are in session; you really get a feel for the campus flavor," he said. "Otherwise, all colleges look the same, and there are 4,000 of them."

For students admitted to more than one institution struggling to make a choice, Perez suggests looking at the course catalog as a starting point to differentiate between programs.

"I wouldn't just exclusively look at the catalog – also look at the outcomes. How many students are graduating from the institution? How many are getting a job? How many go to graduate school? What's the ratio between professors and students? Those kinds of things will help with making a better decision," Perez said. "The catalog is a great resource, but it shouldn't be the only resource to evaluate the academic reputation of an institution."

Students should be thinking about potential majors, DeJohn said. He said going online and studying the majors and options at a school can help narrow the list of schools.

"If possible, they should project, over four years, what courses they'd be taking for their major. If they don't have a particular [major in mind], be prepared for junior and senior year. [This means] choosing classes wisely freshman and sophomore year," he said.

Getting involved in the college community before arriving on campus in the fall can be done via social media, Perez said.

"A lot of colleges have websites for new students, or social media. This builds more of a bond prior to those orientation dates that most schools have over the summer," he said. "You get to meet people with like majors and interests, people living in your residence hall and maybe your roommate. It helps with the retention of students as well, from a college perspective."

DeJohn warns against "senioritis," which often plagues high school seniors as the end of school nears.

"It's important for those who maybe haven't been as successful as others, and even those who are, to keep their grades up until June," he said. "Colleges will look at grades, especially if a student has a merit scholarship. A college does have the right to reassess that money."

Perez said choosing a college is an investment in a student's future, so he encourages taking time to make a final decision, and constantly get information prior to making that decision.

"Most colleges have open houses and admitted student events or overnight programs. Take advantage of all of those opportunities to really be engaged with the institution itself. You want to make sure you pick the one that may be the best fit for you," he said. "Sometimes, students fall in love with what they see on a website and never step foot on campus to get a feeling of the culture."

Although this can be a stressful time for both parents and students, DeJohn said it is important to stop and enjoy the feeling and success of being accepted.

"It's a happy time. The bottom line is, they want to pick a college where they can really feel comfortable. It's their new home, [a place where they can] really develop and grow," he said. "It's a really special time that they're not going to have later in life." WHL

Looking back

Association has milestone anniversary of becoming the teachers' union

by Tracey Wilson
Town Historian
LIFE Columnist

Fifty years ago this past November, 539 out of 660 West Hartford teachers voted to have the West Hartford Education Association be the sole representative for its public school teachers.

This gave the association the power to negotiate contracts with the West Hartford Board of Education. At that moment, the association became a union with the ability to collectively bargain with the Board of Education. Though an affiliate of the American Federation of Teachers existed in West Hartford, they did not challenge the WHEA in this election.

Before the association had the legal standing as a union, then Superintendent of Schools Charles Richter met one-on-one with each teacher and had them sign their contract as an individual. Teachers had no say in working conditions, and no protections of their rights. For instance, In the 1960s, a woman who was pregnant had to quit teaching when she "showed." The Board of Education also had a rule that upon turning 65, a teacher had to retire.

Prior to the historic vote November 10, 1965 to make the WHEA the teachers' union, the association's power came through public persuasion and bringing lawsuits against the Board of Education as in the 1963 Herzig case. Fred Herzig, a teacher at Conard High School, was forced to retire when he reached the age of 65. The courts found that he had the right to remain teaching.

There was much upheaval in the West Hartford Public Schools in the 1960s through a time of rapid growth in the system. In 1963, the Board of Education forced Superintendent Ed Thorne to retire after 16 years on the job. In 1964, the board hired Charles Richter to replace Thorne. Richter came with the reputation of being innovative, full of energy and, by many accounts, strong willed and overbearing. He and the board believed they should have sole decision-making ability over contracts and working conditions.

This set the scene for a four-year battle to get a written contract.

The vote for collective bargaining was long in the making.

The WHEA began in 1928 as an association of professionals. In 1935, the National Labor Relations Act, also known as the Wagner Act,

It took four years, a lawsuit, a proposed slow-down by the teachers, hundreds of hours of negotiations, mediators and arbitrators to negotiate the first contract.

allowed workers in the private sector to collectively bargain. It was not until 1962, when President John F. Kennedy signed Executive Order 10998, that federal public employees earned the right to collectively bargain. Connecticut's Legislature passed PL10-153 in 1965 giving teachers the right to join and elect an organization, and then establish a bargaining unit in negotiations with their board of education.

Fifty years ago, West Hartford teachers did just that.

Having the association represent them was only the start.

The WHEA leadership then began to bargain for a written contract. It took four years, a lawsuit, a proposed slow-down by the teachers, hundreds of hours of negotiations, mediators and arbitrators to negotiate it.

Attempts for a written contract started in earnest with a unanimous vote by representative council in 1966. Richter wrote to WHEA President Janice Falcon, stating his support.

Teachers wanted to negotiate working conditions, grievance procedures and insurance, as well as salaries, but 1966 proved to be a year full of contentious issues for the board and the superintendent. School busing from Hartford – Project Concern – began in summer school that year, voters turned down a referendum to build a new Hall High, and the union helped Wolcott teachers voice their grievances about an overbearing principal.

Negotiations hit an impasse because Richter wanted to remain the final arbiter of all grievances.

In May 1967, Board of Education Chair Edward Mosehauer said, "I'm willing to negotiate with them, but the Board of Education runs this school system and that is not going to change."

By June 1967, no agreements had been reached about a written contract, and the WHEA encouraged teachers not to sign their individual contracts; 400 teachers refused to sign.

By October 1967, the Hartford Courant reported that contract talks had ended in failure after a 15-hour mediation session and the negotiation would go to arbitration.

WHEA President Falkin asked both the Connecticut Education Association and the National Education Association to investigate the contract impasse over working conditions, accumulated sick days, release time for the WHEA president and grievance procedures. Salary schedules had already been agreed to. THE CEA report, released in January 1968 claimed that a tough administration caused unrest among the staff.

Very quickly, arbitration hit a snag. The Board of Education chose

Looking ahead

WHEA president discusses plans for the future

by Abigail Albair
Executive Editor

The West Hartford Education Association, which began as a professional association in 1928, celebrated 50 years as a union last November with an eye to education issues of the future.

The event was held at the Noah Webster House and featured historical perspective from Town Historian Dr. Tracey Wilson and memories of past WHEA Presidents Susan Daly and Ingrid Petty. Board of Education members, State Sen. Beth Bye and State Rep. Andy Fleischmann all joined in the evening's festivities.

While there was much to recognize in the organization's past, several issues that remain on the horizon have the potential to impact the WHEA and education as a whole, according to WHEA President Ted Goerner.

"I became president in June so I'm still learning the ropes, but it's been a very busy fall, very productive," he said in early January.

The WHEA held four events so far this school year, including a meet the candidates night prior to the November municipal election. Roughly 60 teachers turned out to hear prospective Town Council and Board of Education members discuss their stances on education.

"They all spoke highly about West Hartford's school system and its history," Goerner said. "It was nice to hear. They all came through the system or have kids in the system."

The WHEA formed a new Ethnic Affairs Committee this school year and hosted a mixer in December.

"We have a really diverse student population in West Hartford. A lot of people don't feel that our faculty really reflects that diversity, so we will begin making efforts to retain and recruit qualified teachers of color," Goerner explained. "I think it's best for students, they feel more at ease and at home if the faculty looks like they do. Diversity makes the place richer and stronger;

not just skin color, but cultural and religious diversity, too."

The WHEA has been keeping an eye on the privatization movement in Connecticut and across the country and the rise of charter schools and the competition that creates for state funding.

It also continues to encourage administrators and those in government to not look solely at test scores when judging the quality of education happening within a school system or when evaluating teachers.

Earlier this month, the state union Connecticut Education Association called for the elimination of the Smarter Balanced Assessment standardized test claiming the test is unfair, in part, because of the fact that it is all done via computer, which leaves students who do not have regular computer access at a disadvantage.

"Computerized testing introduces a host of new variables into the equation," Goerner said. "Valid comparisons cannot be made if students are not taking the test on the same computer platform. A chromebook is not the same as a desktop. The screen is three times smaller on many chromebooks and it has 73 keys on the keyboard as opposed to 103 on a typical keyboard. If you are using a chromebook for word processing for example, good luck finding the delete key. There isn't one."

Goerner is concerned with the impacts standardized testing has on learning in general.

"If there is that much emphasis being placed on standardized tests, so teaching and learning follows right along and curriculum becomes more narrow as teachers teach to the test," Goerner said. "Standardized testing can lead to standardized learning. ... Since not everything that can be taught will be taught due to time constraints, teachers will choose to teach those things they know are covered on the test, which leads to standardized gaps in our student populations."

Connecticut regularly scores in the top 10 on the National Assessment of Educational Progress and West Hartford schools regularly receive national recognition.

"If it isn't broken don't fix it," he said. "The majority of schools systems in Connecticut including West Hartford are not only not broken, but they are exceptional."

The WHEA, along with the Connecticut Education Association and unions around the country, are waiting for the Supreme Court ruling in the Friedrichs v. California Teachers Association case, which, if the ruling is in favor of the plaintiff – Rebecca Friedrichs and other educators – would mean any educator could join a union and receive union benefits without paying dues.

"Diversity makes the place richer and stronger."

—Ted Goerner

Roughly 96 percent of West Hartford teachers are full union members, while a small number are agency fee payers, meaning they pay a partial fee and are therefore covered by collective bargaining, but they do not receive other benefits.

Goerner said the concern is that full dues-paying members of unions will choose to no longer pay dues if the Supreme Court case rules in favor of Friedrichs, meaning they can receive collective bargaining benefits without being union members.

"It could be a pretty damaging blow to unions nationwide," he said. "We might loose 20 percent of our union membership. We hope we don't." **WHL**

Willis Parsons to be its arbitrator. He had been board chair until 1965 and then became Richter's personal attorney.

The WHEA brought suit against the board and won in February 1968, with the court arguing that Parsons could not be impartial. With a win under their belt, but still no contract, the WHEA and the Board of Education attempted to negotiate once more.

In the summer of 1968, teachers voted again not to sign their salary agreements. The WHEA came up with a set of issues on which it would "slow down" for the two days at the end of school after students finished to try to pressure the board. In return, the board threatened to withhold half of their June salaries if they participated in the "three-day boycott."

The board did not issue paychecks on June 15. That same day, the state education commissioner stepped in and helped the two sides reach an agreement. The teachers called off their slowdown.

On July 3, 1968 the teachers signed their first written contract for one year. It took 17 months to negotiate, but the troubled relationships among the union and the board and superintendent did not end there.

In 1969, the Board of Education chose to test the new Teacher Negotiation Act passed by the state legislature in 1969. This new law forced boards of education to negotiate on more working conditions. The WHEA wanted to negotiate a contract for both teachers and administrators. Even though they had settled the salaries, the negotiations went to arbitration and a three-man arbitration panel came up with a package after 22 failed negotiation sessions, and failed mediation. The board, led by John Hand Conard, rejected the proposal.

At year's end, the two sides had still not agreed on the contract. It wasn't until September, when the teachers were already back at school, that both sides agreed to a new contract, 15 months after negotiations started.

Many factors contributed to their first contracts – among the most important being the federal government's role in allowing public employees to collectively bargain and then the Connecticut law, which allowed for the bargaining of working conditions as well as pay.

Ultimately, the binding arbitration law of 1979 changed these long, drawn-out negotiations. **WHL**

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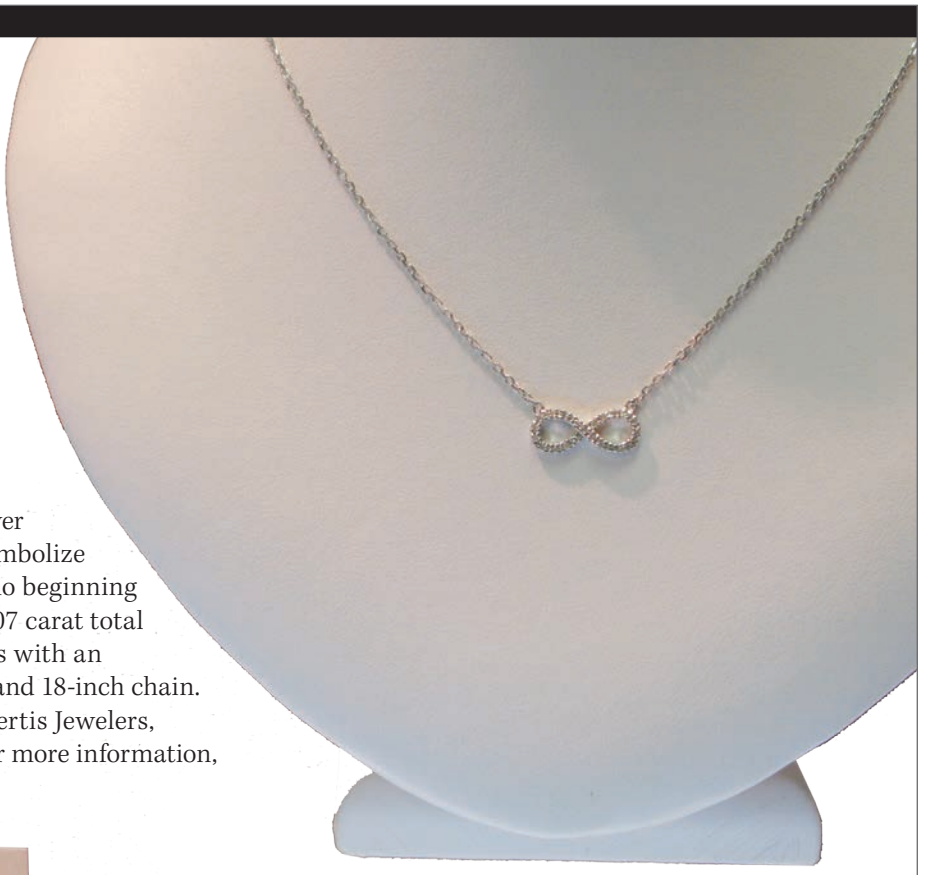

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Tips for lifelong love

Valentine's Day advice from those married 50 years or more

by Mark Jahne
LIFE Staff

Even the best marriage has its occasional bumps and problems, and many experience more serious trials and tribulations. Some couples choose to go their separate ways, but others maintain the commitment they made to one another when they exchanged vows and remain married for 50 years or longer.

Several area couples were asked to share their advice on how to live a happy and fulfilling married life well into their golden years. Here is a sample of what they said.

Angelo and Tani Faenza of West Hartford exchanged vows 54 years ago. They reflected on what it took to get to this point in their lives and still be happy together.

"You have to be patient. You can't fly off the handle. Think before you talk. Don't hold a grudge; forgive," Tani said. "You have to listen to each other."

"You've got to have the intention of making this a lifelong thing and raising kids. You need to talk and sometimes you need to give in," Angelo added. "We have four children and their spouses and we're all very close."

His wife agreed that communication is an important component of a successful marriage. Even though her husband worked late many nights when he was involved in the restaurant business, they always made it a point to talk before bed.

"The longer you're married, the more you depend on that," Angelo said. "We always worked as a team."

"We were equals from the beginning," Tani added. "We never had male and female roles. We were partners."

No matter how busy, they always made time for each other. The couple met in their early teens and married when he was 20 and she was 19.

Michael and Lucille Rizzo of Wethersfield have 67 years of marriage behind them.

"It's a big responsibility," Michael said.

People should not get married just for the sake of it. They also need to understand

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that, no matter how much in love they are, they will not always agree, he added.

"One of you has to be smart enough to keep your mouth shut" to avoid arguments, he said with a chuckle.

"It's not a 50-50 proposition. If you each give 75 percent, you're going to make it. It's a two-way street," Lucille said. "After a while, you're so together that you almost become one."

Alois and Clara Weber of West Hartford were married in 1962. They agreed that it is important to work out any differences so that they don't fester and damage the matrimonial bond.

"We get along. Everybody has their ups and downs. Every marriage has a couple of bumps," Alois said.

"You have to work out the bumps," Clara said. "Have patience, talk, don't go to bed mad."

Joyce and Gilman Rossignol of Wethersfield got married as teenagers in 1947. Now, 68 years later, they are still together.

"We had our differences over the years" but always worked them out. We're happy with our family," Joyce said.

"We get along good. I would say we're happy. He's Mr. Reliable," she added. "He worked days and I worked nights. We only saw each other on weekends."

"I'm a happy man. These have been happy years," Gilman said.

"I do my thing and he does his, that's the secret. And we have to acknowledge that we have our likes and our dislikes."

–Catherine Lawlor

He recalled walking Joyce home one evening while they were still in high school and kissing her under the streetlight. He immediately knew she was the woman for him and never faltered from that belief.

"When I kissed her under that lamppost, that was it right there," he said.

Erwin and Helga Schramma of Farmington were married 63 years ago. They were a young couple when they came to America from their native Germany with a 5-week-old child in tow.

"Make sure you never go to bed mad. Always make up. Life is too short," Helga said.

She added that it's important to love your children and work with your spouse to raise them well.

"We keep our money separate," Erwin said.

But he quickly added that they share funds with each other as needed. He encourages husbands not to dominate their wives and to let them live their own lives. For example, he said some men of his generation don't like their wives to drive alone.

Eric and Edith Hartleb of Newington walked down the aisle 53 years ago.

"Listen to your wife. The sooner you learn to listen to your wife, the happier your marriage will be," Eric said. "You have to work together, be of one mind."

"You have to appreciate, be willing to give and take. Keep a sense of humor, stick together," Edith said.

Catherine and Vin Lawlor of Glastonbury have been married 65 years and offer some simple – but not necessarily easy – advice.

"We don't necessarily do everything together," Catherine said. "I do my thing and he does his, that's the secret. And we have to acknowledge that we have our likes and our dislikes."

Vin has a slightly different take on the subject.

"One of my co-workers told me once that she's a saint for putting up with me."

Catherine chuckled.

"Neither one of us is perfect," she said. **WHL**

Nancy Thompson also contributed to this story.

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Your thoughts

What is love?

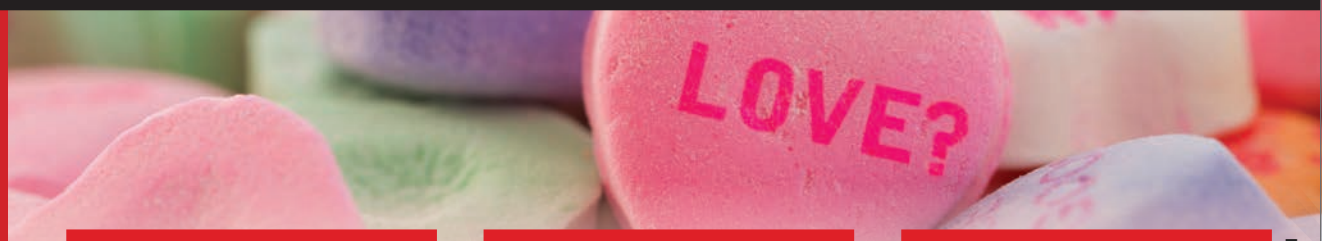
by Alicia B. Smith
Staff Writer

William Shakespeare wrote, "When I saw you I fell in love, and you smiled because you knew." But how did they know and what exactly does it mean to be in love anyways?

These are questions that poets and troubadours have wrestled with since the dawn of time but no definitive answer has been found and men and women continue searching for a satisfactory answer.

We may have developed our own thoughts on the subject of love and so have some area youngsters. To get their input on the topic West Hartford LIFE visited Morley Elementary School to find out...

"What is love?"



"A relationship that's stronger."—*Griffin Krupp, 8*

"It's like a warmth and its kindness."—*Ryan Miale, 9*

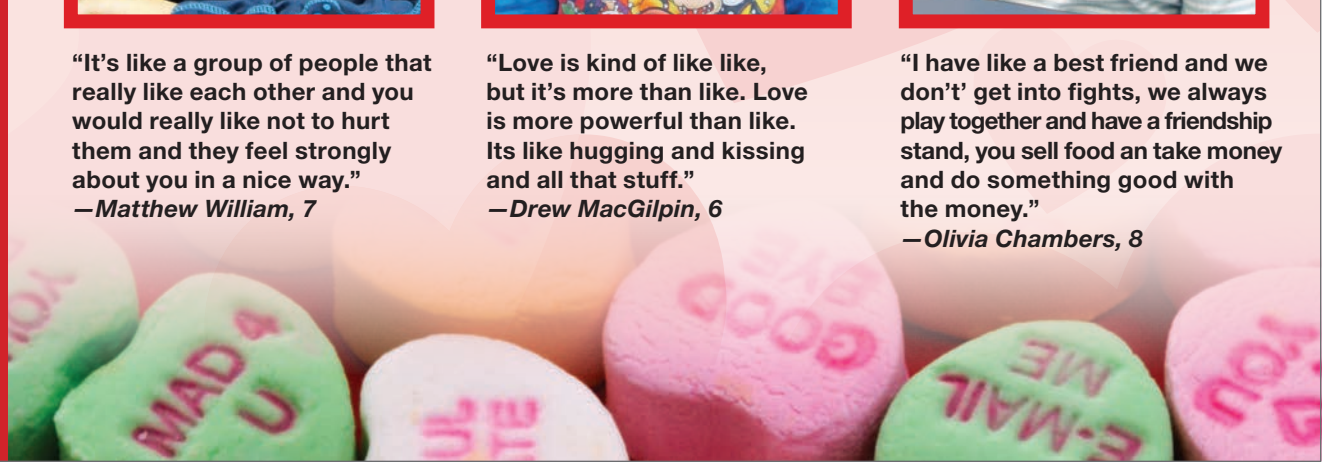
"Friendship, caring for one another."—*Bessie Nelson, 8*

Photos by Alicia B. Smith

"It's like a group of people that really like each other and you would really like not to hurt them and they feel strongly about you in a nice way."
—Matthew William, 7

"Love is kind of like like, but it's more than like. Love is more powerful than like. Its like hugging and kissing and all that stuff."
—Drew MacGilpin, 6

"I have like a best friend and we don't' get into fights, we always play together and have a friendship stand, you sell food an take money and do something good with the money."
—Olivia Chambers, 8



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"When grown-ups think about having kids."—*Siobhan Jassor, 9*

"It's a warm feeling you have in your heart."—*Josh Mabe, 8*

"Love is like where we get friends and play with them."
—Liam Deloreto, 7

"When you give hugs and kisses and you like someone."
—Matthew LaBreck, 7

"Love is when two people love each other, they are dating and plan on having a baby, and they love each other and kiss on the lips everyday."—*Sean Fay, 9*

"Love is like when you like something like really much."
—Caleb Worrell, 8

"It's something you do to help people. If you are nice to a person you feel good and you are spreading love and you feel good yourself."—*Maddie Fanning, 7*

"It's like when someone wants to play Star Wars and you really like that person you might say yes."
—Drew Manaresi, 7

"It's when you get to know somebody you might really like them and want to be with them and really want to love them so you might stay together."
—Lucy Gwiacdoski, 7

"Its something when two people like each other and they want to be with each other a long time so they can get to know each other."
—Kate Dempsey, 8

"Love is like when people really like each other and they respect each other and help each other and they are always near each other and like to play together."
—Brynn Bourdeau, 7

"Love is something that you really want. You always want to be next to them and be with them when they are gone, you just want to be with them."
—Ryan Haggerty, 8

Terry and Joanne Ryan, along with their daughter and son-in-law Samantha (in red) and James Hines (right), relocated to West Hartford from Australia to open their second Cookshop Plus location.

The store includes a coffee bar in partnership with NEAT Coffee out of Darien.

Photos by Abigail Albair

From 'Down Under' to the Center

Family relocates to West Hartford from Australia in pursuit of business adventure

by Abigail Albair
Executive Editor

For an Australian family, the dream of opening a United States location of their business has been realized in West Hartford.

It was over dinner conversation more than a year ago that Joanne and Terry Ryan, along with their daughter Samantha Hines and her husband, James, began discussing potential new horizons for their entrepreneurial endeavors.

"I think it just came up in conversation one night. We sort of decided that, yes, opening another store was the way we wanted to go. We were talking about going to Europe and started talking about America," Samantha Hines recalled.

Joanne and Terry Ryan purchased the Cookshop Plus location in Bowral, Australia more than a decade ago when Terry decided he wanted to leave a career in information technology and become a business owner. In the years along the way, he and his wife expanded the business as much as possible, moving to a larger location and increasing merchandise offerings.

Samantha and James – who were married at the beginning of last year – took over management of the store in recent years.

"We always knew that there was going to be another step," Hines said. "We were just trying to figure out what it was, whether it was us all opening [a new location] together or James and I opening one and [my parents] opening one. We all ultimately just wanted a new challenge.

"James and myself got married at the beginning of [2015] so we didn't have any real ties to Australia. We don't have kids, we didn't have a house. We thought, 'Let's do it now before we have all these ties and it gets a little bit more complicated.'"

Hines and her husband, as well as her parents, all have a love of traveling – she's lived in Ireland, where her parents grew up, Canada and Australia – and all have been to America many times.

"Jimmy and I did a cross-country back packing trip three years ago now and we've been all across America," Samantha Hines said. "We love most of it. We could see ourselves living anywhere."

Still, she said, the group had a fondness for New England and was drawn to a location in that part of the country – situated somewhere between Boston and New York – for their next adventure.

After an extensive search conducted by Joanne and Terry over several months, they settled on West Hartford as the spot. It edged out Cape Cod in the final decision-making process.

"West Hartford really suits our business," Hines said. "We seem to fit in this environment."

Her parents stayed with friends in town while they searched for a prime location, eventually choosing a Farmington Avenue site in the heart of the Center. "For us, it's the lifestyle as well [in addition to a business opportunity]," Joanne Ryan said. "It's a beautiful town. It's got everything we were hoping to find."

They are all now residents of West Hartford and although her parents had been to town several times to secure a location for their store, Hines said she and her husband arrived in August sight unseen.

Australian beginnings

Hines grew up in Sydney, Australia and was still in high school when her father decided it was time for a career change. Terry and Joanne decided to buy a business and started looking for a new place to go. It was during a trip for one of Samantha's school sporting events that the pair became intrigued by Bowral – a town located an hour and a half outside of their home city.

They started looking for businesses in that area that were for sale and found Cookshop Plus, a kitchenware store that hadn't been open very long. So, the family moved to a new home in Bowral and the first leg of their business adventure began.

"We didn't change anything that first year," Terry Ryan said, in terms of physical space and merchandise, though he did update the store to a computerized system.

By the time he and Joanne were finished with their expansion plans, they had moved to a new location on Bowral's Main Street that was three times the size of the initial space.

"We grew that business to the point where we couldn't grow it any further," he said.

"They did an awesome job," Samantha Hines said. "An awesome enough job to get us here."

Although purchasing Cookshop Plus was a business decision, the products offered by the store soon became a passion for the family.

"It turned into something that we all really, really love," Hines said.

The store – both the Australian and American locations – offers "a broad spectrum" of products, she said,

with a goal of affordability of options, including those that are more exclusive.

While Joanne is "an amazing cook" who enjoys the gadgets sold in the store, according to her daughter, Hines is more of a baker and enjoys cake-decorating items. "My husband is into fry pans and cookware," she said. "We all know about the latest and greatest cookware items."

The family left a management team in place in Australia when they relocated together to West Hartford to open their Farmington Avenue location.

"We're definitely here for the foreseeable future," Hines said, explaining that they will travel back to Australia a few times a year to check on things.

When they began renovating their West Hartford site – which Terry noted is larger still than their Australian store at its final expanded size – no major structural work was needed, so most of the preparation for opening included painting, sprucing and stocking the shelves with product.

The family worked many long days to open just in time for the Holiday Stroll in early December. Residents browsed the offerings of tableware, bakeware, cookware, barware, cutlery, glassware and a variety of complimenting pieces that night and interest in the business has only grown since, Hines said.

A grand opening event was held Jan. 23 to coincide with Australia Day, celebrated Jan. 26.

"We've got a huge amount of support and positive feedback," she said. "Everyone just seems really, genuinely excited."

Former Pfau's Hardware Store owner Debbie Hunter, whose husband Russell Hunter owned Pfau's until his passing in 2014, took a job at Cookshop Plus after selling her business to Larsen Ace Hardware last year.

"They're a family business and I just really love what they bring to the Center," Hunter said of Cookshop Plus.

The owners plan to import some Australian products, while also exporting some American products to their other store. They carry a range of candles by Australian company Hutwoods, including a custom scent created just for Cookshop Plus called Australian Outback. "It smells like home," Hines said with a smile.

The store includes a coffee bar in partnership with NEAT Coffee out of Darien. NEAT representatives trained the Cookshop Plus staff in utilizing their brand to create "Australian-style coffee," or what Americans would consider Italian-style coffee, Hines said.

Photos by Abigail Albair

"We love our coffee so it was a little bit of a selfish decision for us as well," she added with a laugh.

Within the next year, the family plans to put a kitchen on the basement level of the store for cooking demonstrations and classes. For now, they are excited with the reception they have received and are growing accustomed to their new home.

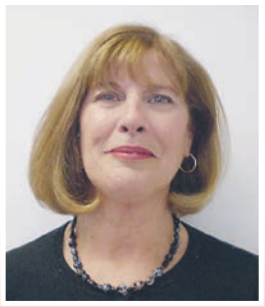
"We love it, it's really good," Samantha said of West Hartford. "It's such a great vibe. There are so many nice restaurants around and we've got a lot of support from everyone. It feels like we're part of the community already, which is really great for us."

There was a learning curve, Hines said, both when it came to merchandise and to life in America.

Some kitchenware items, for example, have different names here than they do in Australia, and the family has had to adjust to the usage of miles and Fahrenheit as forms of measurement.

"It's summer in Australia right now," Hines said. "Thirty-two degrees to me is really hot but it's freezing here." WHL

Cookshop Plus is located at 977 Farmington Avenue. For more information find Cookshop Plus West Hartford on Facebook.



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Giulia

Giulia a 2-year-old Cane Corso Mastiff found roaming in town. She weighs 80 pounds, which is about 10 pounds underweight, and one eye is currently being treated with antibiotic drops. Giulia is a goof ball who loves attention; she can be a little insecure and gets overstimulated easily. She loves to jump in your lap or lean in for affection. She appears to not have had any training, but she is intelligent and is learning manners quickly. Giulia seems to like other dogs. The ideal family will have experience with this breed. **WHL**

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News notes

Park Road, I-84 interchange project detailed

Members of the town's engineering department and a representative from the Department of Transportation provided an update on the ongoing design plans to reconfigure the Park Road at Interstate 84 interchange. The project will relocate the I-84 off-ramp so it is adjacent to the existing on-ramp as well as other changes meant to improve intersection capacity, efficiency and safety. The off-ramp will be re-graded and widened to provide an additional left turn lane. The crest curve that currently causes drivers to lose sightlines while approaching the intersection will be eliminated.

Museum shares relocation proposal with public

The New Children's Museum gave a presentation on its proposed relocation plans to the public and opened the topic up for discussion as it continues to pursue a hopeful move to the University of Connecticut property. The plans focus on "creating a family-friendly cultural campus, driving local economic development and preserving green space," according to a press release.
The museum board of directors has been searching for a new location for some time, and when it heard that UConn will vacate its West Hartford campus in 2017, an opportunity seemed clear, said Interim Executive Director Michael Werle.

Arcadia Crossing development approved

The Town Council voted in favor of Arcadia Crossing, a new development approved for the Sisters of Saint Joseph property.
The application by Center Development Corporation was approved January 12.
A majority of the 22-acre property will be rezoned from single-family housing residential to a residential multi-family, multi-story zone.
It will be designated a Special Development District to allow for the redevelopment and reuse of the existing structure and the construction of a new residential building containing 310 apartment units. As part of the plan, the sisters will consolidate their living into the west wing of the existing building. The $100 million project is expected to generate $1 million in property tax revenue.
Several residents called for a condition of approval requiring the developer to designate a portion of the new development as affordable for low-income tenants. The council ultimately opted not to include this component but did pass a resolution calling for the town manager to further investigate how affordable housing can be encouraged in town in the future.

Negotiation for UConn purchase OK'd

The Town Council has unanimously approved a resolution to begin negotiations for the purchase of the UConn site in town, the first step in what will be a lengthy process to potentially acquire the site and determine a future use.
UConn notified the town in early December of its intent to sell the approximately 58-acre campus on the north side of Asylum Avenue at the intersection of Trout Brook Drive, and offered the town its right of first refusal.

Consultant chosen for transit-oriented development study on New Park

The town has chosen Fuss & O'Neill to conduct a study with regard to transit-oriented development on New Park Avenue. The CTfastrak stations in West Hartford, along with a potential rail stop in the future, opened the door to transit-oriented development opportunities, according to Director of Community Services Mark McGovern. A change to the zoning code made in 2014 permits residential uses in the general business zone and the general industrial zone, a change that will make mixed-use development possible along New Park Avenue. **WHL**

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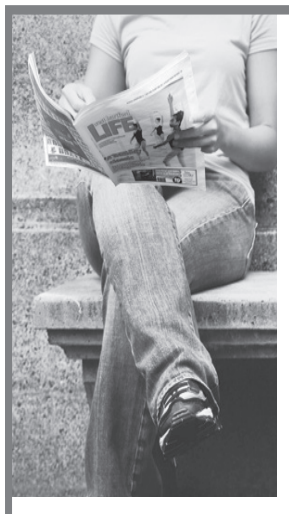
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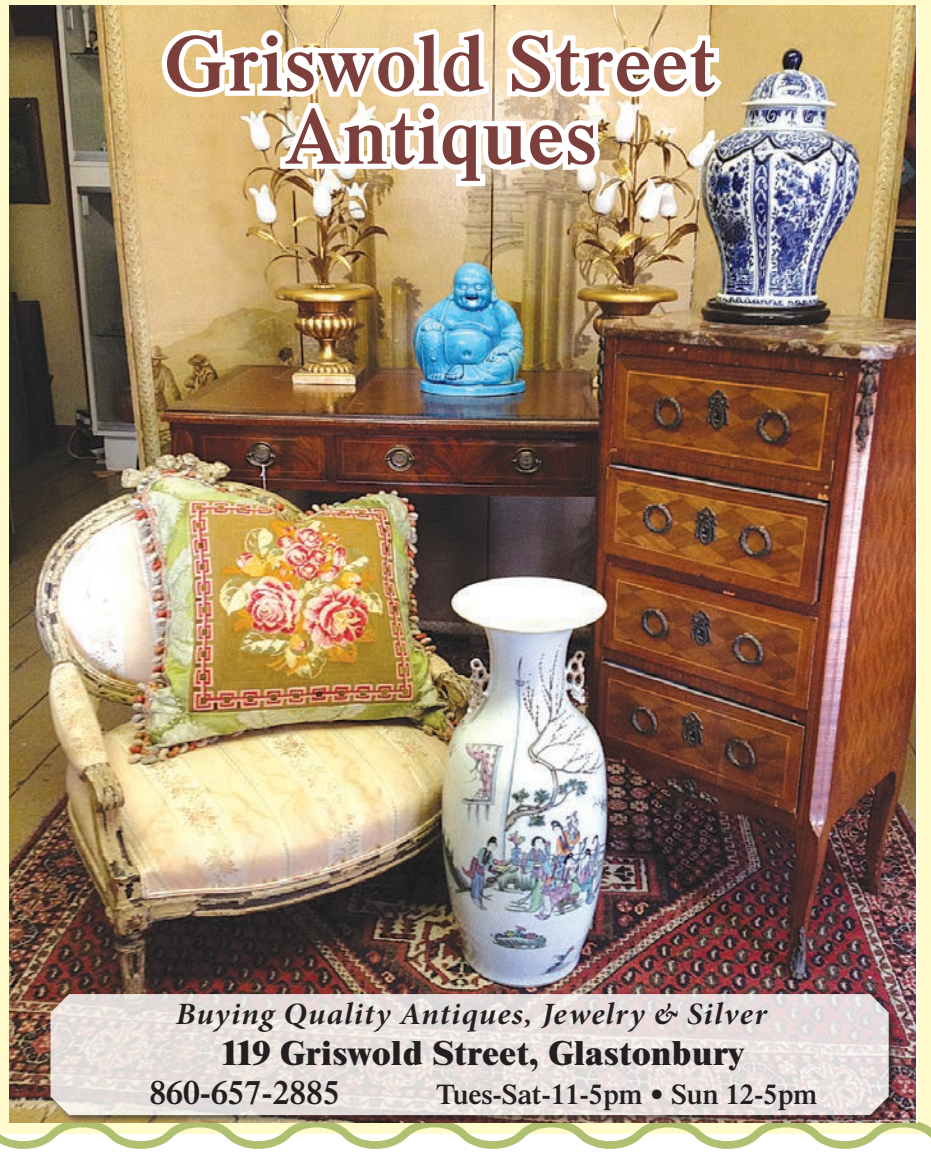

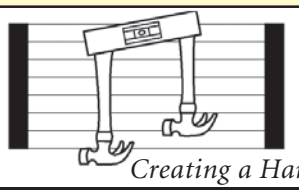

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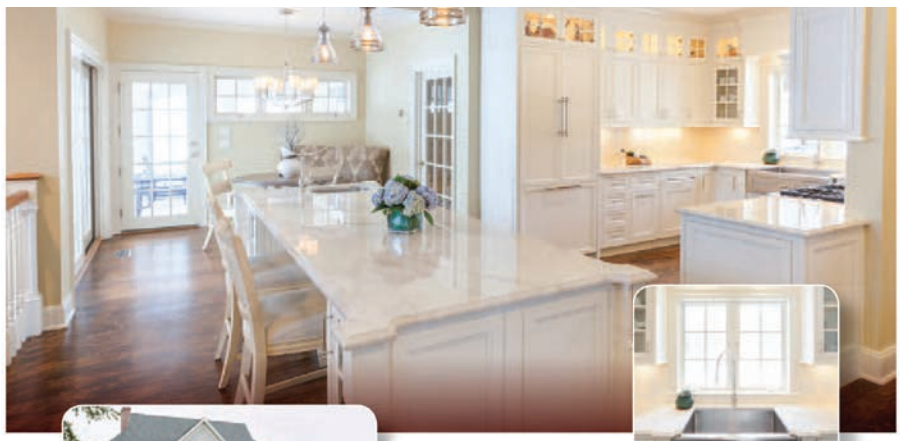

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Writer's block

Winter garden

by Lynn Woike
Editor

Photo by Lynn Woike

The gardening season starts in the dead of winter when seed catalogs, along with my application for a community garden plot, arrive in the mail. Those are always the first two signs that spring is just two months away.

Comfortable on the couch, the planning starts in February. I traditionally make six 10-foot rows in the plot that's 20 feet long, which limits what I can grow to something that's manageable once it's established.

I plant both fruits and vegetables, and flowers – one to feed my body, one to feed my soul. February is when I begin to figure out if they get equal billing, what I want and where it will go. Should I again plant sunflowers and corn in the row on the north side where they don't shade my other plants, or do I need to rotate them? I'll study each of the two dozen varieties of sunflowers to decide which one to try when the Zulu Prince Daisy plants will make me wonder if it's time for something different.

Speaking of different, now's when I try to figure out why the squash and beans I planted with the corn last year did not thrive the way they're supposed to with the Three Sisters method, and what to do about it this year. I'll spend part of one evening figuring out if I'll try broomcorn instead, which is not really corn. However, it needs 110 days above 67 degrees to come to harvest, which will require research to see if we have that many, and, if we do, should I consider dividing half the garden into rectangles to fit in more plants.

I'll use another evening to ponder timing. Last year, I took the "days until harvest" too literally. Knowing I wanted corn and sunflowers at the end of July and tiny pumpkins in mid-September, I resorted to doing the math. I counted backwards on a calendar from the desired harvest date until I got to the correct number of days on the packet, and that's when I planted the seeds. Well, it seems, seeds can't read. The corn came too early and the sunflowers were late; the tiny pumpkins barely produced at all.

In February, everything in my garden looks like it does on the seed packets, resulting in a masterpiece of color and flavor. Nothing requires planting, pollinating, propagating or pruning. There are no weeds in the garden in February. The ground is frozen and covered with snow, yet it's ripe with possibilities.

We gardeners are hopeful souls. Planting seeds is an act of faith. We believe in fairies and make offerings to insect totems.

This year, I find myself wanting to grow my heritage: onions, potatoes and cabbage for my German genes; tomatoes, parsley and fava beans for my Sicilian side. I want to grow flowers my grandmother grew: cosmos, zinnia and daisies.

I want to try things I've never tried before, such as onions and melon.

While I'm on the couch, it all seems feasible.

Forget that I don't have a greenhouse to get a jump on the season. Forget that I don't need 25 seeds, I just want three plants. Forget that not everything I plant grows, and some things I don't remember planting do.

I know what everything is in February. Come July, I won't be able to tell you the name of the yellow tomato or the variety of cucumber.

Here on my couch, with a cup of tea, I have no memory of how hungry mosquitos are in the morning, how quickly leaf mold can kill a plant or often I had to water during long, dry spells. I have no fear of thieves – be they two-legged, four-legged or winged – appearing at what must look like 60 feet of an all-you-can-eat buffet.

To quell the longing to again plant radishes, lettuce and pansies, I grow what I can indoors.

There's lavender and rosemary in pots by my kitchen window, along with an orchid that is about to rebloom in another week. In the dining room are Christmas cactus, an amaryllis in full bloom and ivy cuttings that have rooted and need to be potted. I also just started an organic mushroom farm in a box, which promises a harvest in 10 days, and a glass jar with a planting medium and a packet of cilantro seeds to which I just add sun and water. I can hardly wait to make sauteed mushrooms with cilantro. **WHL**

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- February was brutally cold with an average temperature of 16.1 degrees, making it the all-time coldest month; it was also the 3rd snowiest February with a total of 31.9 inches
- May was the warmest with an average temperature of 66.1 degrees (6.6 degrees warmer than normal)
- 18 days featured a temperature 90 degrees or higher (which is only 1 day above the annual average), the hottest temperature was 95 degrees on July 29th
- No tornadoes were reported in Connecticut, and there was no direct impact from any tropical system
- The autumn season (September, October, and November) tied for the 5th warmest on record
- The year was dry, in fact much of the state was classified in a 'moderate' drought with total precipitation at 39.21 inches, which is 6.64 inches below normal
- December goes down as the warmest with an average temperature of 43.3 degrees, an amazing 11.7 degrees above normal… more incredible: it was 4.7 degrees warmer than the previous record of 38.6 degrees in December of 1923!

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